FROM RED HOODS TO BLUE BEARDS:

FAIRY-TALE INTERTEXTS IN

ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK

AND SYLVIA PLATH

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the unsung fairy-tale intertext between Alejandra Pizarnik and Sylvia Plath. As it does so, this project steps away from psychic considerations of their creative work as suicide poets and creates an international intertextual fairy-tale dialogue that fills a gap in the critical tradition of fairy-tale scholarship—a gap that has been addressed by leading scholars in the field. More specifically, the intertextual landscape of this study hinges on reworkings of the classic Red Riding Hood and Bluebeard tales and their echoes found in Plath and Pizarnik. The present study creates a constellation that does not imply influence, but rather juxtaposes Plath and Pizarnik against one another and comparatively reads Plath and Pizarnik against the classic print fairy tales of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. This study also highlights Plath and Pizarnik's creative pieces as meditations on feminine agency as it relates to appetite, which encompasses desire and creativity; and feminine endurance, which involves intrepidness and curiosity. These meditations on the feminine, which ultimately laud multidesirous female subjects and their marvelously shifting identities, contribute a strategy for reading Perrault and the Grimms that would be otherwise inaccessible to the field of fairy-tale scholarship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of women writers who rework the fairy-tale is vast—almost as vast, perhaps, as the tradition of fairy-tales themselves. Writers like Angela Carter and Anne Sexton may come to mind as retellers—women who reharness the patriarchal presentations of desire, sexuality and power in classic print versions of fairy tales to meditate on the feminine in unexpected ways. This study considers seventeenth and eighteenth century print versions by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, which read as the stuffy, stodgy predecessors of twentieth century rewrites like Carter's, Sexton's, and also Sylvia Plath's and Alejandra Pizarnik's. Plath and Pizarnik do not likely come to mind along with Carter and Sexton, yet they contribute comparably to the history of feminist reworkings of fairy tales. More specifically, the intertextual landscape of this study is founded in reworkings of the Red Riding Hood and Bluebeard tales and their echoes found in Plath and Pizarnik's work. This study creates a constellation that does not imply influence, but rather juxtaposes Plath and Pizarnik against one another and comparatively reads Plath and Pizarnik against the classic print fairy tales.

For critics of both Plath and Pizarnik, there has existed a tendency to focus largely on issues of psychic and autobiographical scope, and it is perhaps for this reason that their redeployment of fairy tales does not enjoy the attention of scholarly critics. Pizarnik

critic Susan Bassnett comments on and provides an example of this tendency:

> Alejandra Pizarnik was first pointed out to me as a parallel case to Sylvia Plath—a woman writer who committed suicide…whose distressed self-image provided her with a central theme and who was fascinated by images of death and silence. (36).

As Bassnett suggests, the tendency to read Pizarnik and Plath as poets whose bodies of work represent one long poem, and an extended suicide note at that, is common due to their shared focus on images of death and silence.[1] Each writer, however, provides an unsung contribution to the body of work made up by the likes of Carter and Sexton—groups of women who explore and transform classic European tales such as "Bluebeard" and "Red Riding Hood." This study adds them to their company, and further considers Plath and Pizarnik from within their national literary traditions to add Pizarnik to a conversation in the European and Anglo-American world where writers like Carter and Sexton figure more prominently as postmodern rewriters of fairy tale than their Latin American counterparts.

In that sense, this study fills a gap in the critical tradition. Donald Hasse addresses the dearth of studies on international fairy-tale intertextuality in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*: "scholars need to expand the focus of feminist fairy-tale research beyond the Western European and Anglo-American tradition, and even within those traditions to investigate the fairy-tale intertexts in the work of minority writers" (129). Fiona Mackintosh and Patricia Anne Obder de Baubeta take up Hasse's task in essays from the same publication entitled "Babes in the *Bosque*: Fairy Tales in

[1] See, for example, the introduction to *Pizarnik: A Profile*: "Alejandra Pizarnik ranks among the writers who lived, worked and died in the creation/self-destruction nexus, but unlike many of her poet-suicide peers—writers who allowed their self-destructive urge to inform their work rather than preoccupy it—Pizarnik grants death primacy from the start, her suicidal obsession sustaining her vision" (Graziano 9).

Twentieth-Century Argentine Women's Writing" and "The Fairy-Tale Intertext in Iberian and Latin American Women's Writing," respectively. Only Mackintosh, however, includes the Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik in her grouping of fairy tale writers.[2]

She begins her essay by mentioning Pizarnik's familiarity with tales of the European tradition, and noting that the same can be said of her fellow Argentine writers like Luisa Valenzuela[3] and Silvina and Victoria Ocampo, crediting Victoria Ocampo and her status as director of *Sur*, a renowned publishing house and magazine, with diffusing the idea that fairy tales are a subject worthy of serious literary consideration in Argentina (Mackintosh 151). Mackintosh extracts four common "mythemes" from Argentine fairy tale revisions, which are orphans, ogres and Bluebeard, woods, wolves and Red Riding Hood figures (156). Of these four, Pizarnik engages with the figure of Bluebeard through *La condesa sangrienta* (*The Bloody Countess*) and Red Riding Hood through the short poem "La verdad del bosque" ("The Truth of the Forest"). Mackintosh's study briefly contextualizes Pizarnik within the Argentine tradition and its specific national tropes, but does not elaborate on Pizarnik's relationship to a more international collection of taletellers. The juxtaposition of her pieces with Plath's in the following chapters, however, creates such an international intertextual dialogue.

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[2] Twenty years ago, the English-speaking world's general knowledge of Pizarnik was scant. In 1990, Susan Bassnett wrote of Pizarnik as "a great poet who has been so neglected that [her work] is difficult to obtain," especially in translation. Only recently, in 2013, has the first book of poems by Pizarnik been translated into English in its entirety: *Infierno musical* or *A Musical Hell*. Bassnett's own collection of translations entitled *Exchanging Lives* was also published in 2013.

[3] There seems to be a dialogue at work between Valenzuela's "Si esto es la vida, yo soy caperucita roja" (If this is Life, then I'm Little Red Riding Hood) in a section of her book *Simetrías* (*Symmetries*) called "Cuentos de hades" (Firy tales), and Pizarnik's "La verdad del bosque." The last line of Pizarnik's poem is, "¿Y a esto llamas vida? —dijo la abuela" (And you call this a life? —said the grandmother) (34). Valenzeula's piece might be said to pick up where Pizarnik's leaves off, in answer to the grandmother's question.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar make a similar conclusion about Plath's work that slights her contribution to the realm of fairy tale. After repeating throughout their chapter from *No Man's Land* entitled "In Yeats's House" that Sylvia Plath's poetic mission was largely a project of "redefinition"—of "private and public myth," gender, etc.—the authors go on to mention Anne Sexton's "revisions" of fairy tales, a collection entitled *Transformations*, and how Sexton's mission of revision is "philosophically" similar to Plath's (294, 307). Yet, Gilbert and Gubar miss the opportunity to credit Plath along with Sexton for her reworkings of fairy tales. They write, "philosophically if not stylistically, Sexton took up where Plath left off, delineating a range of issues to which women writers influenced by the second wave of feminism would address their poetic letters" (307). Their comparisons overlook that Plath, like Sexton, comments just as strikingly on the cross-dressing wolf of the Red Riding Hood narratives (307). Furthermore, "the books that Plath read avidly in childhood have been largely overlooked despite their relevance to the development of her poetics and narrative strategies" (McCort, *Wonderland* 108). Additionally, critics and scholars tend to focus Plath's work in one central area: "As Jacqueline Rose points out, the Plath myth 'presents all Plath's work in terms of a constant teleological reference to *Ariel*,' where notably none of her work that engages with fairy tale is collected" (McCort, *Wonderland* 4).

Like McCort does in "Getting out of Wonderland," quoted above, the following chapters focus on Plath's pre-*Ariel* period—*Ariel*, written towards the end of Plath's life, was published two years after her death in 1965, while "Stone Boy with Dolphin" and "Bluebeard," considered here, date to the mid-1950s. Unlike McCort, who connects the dots between Plath's personal journals and the pieces mentioned above, the following

analyses attempt to show how Plath's pieces draw not from personal tragedy but directly from the seventeenth and nineteenth century tradition of print tales that includes the Grimm brothers and Perrault. Such close readings reveal Plath's written contribution to the collective space of feminist fairy-tale writers rather than to the construction of her own individual psyche that fuels her mythic status as a suicide poet. In Argentina, Pizarnik's mythic status is quite comparable. What may serve to overshadow their contributions to fairy-tale scholarship are these poets' statuses as mythic tales themselves, which stem in large part from the air of mystery and romance surrounding their deaths.

Fiona Mackintosh founds her study on childhood in Pizarnik upon "el mito de Pizarnik": "I have to begin by acknowledging the elevation of Pizarnik's work and image to something approaching cult status in Argentina and beyond" (*Childhood* 119). Elizabeth Bronfen entitles the first chapter of her book *Sylvia Plath* "The Plath Myth," and subsequently launches into a discussion of "who owns Sylvia Plath's grave," linking Plath's mythic status as a poet to the circumstances surrounding her death. Mackintosh reads Pizarnik similarly in "La Pequeña Alice: Alejandra Pizarnik and *Alice in Wonderland*":

> Her poetic corpus has often been read by critics as a poetics of suicide, since right from the earliest poems there is a fascination with death, which is echoed in Pizarnik's diaries and which gains a tragic aura of authenticity after the poet's death from an overdose. (42)

This habit of reading Plath autobiographically carries over into some scholarly work on her use of fairy tale.[4] The present study instead allows the materiality of her fairy tales—their language, objects and tropes—to take precedence. Although "fairy tales…have an

[4] See Jessica McCort's 2009 dissertation entitled "Getting out of Wonderland: Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich and Anne Sexton" and section two, "Sylvia Plath Through the Looking Glass."

extraordinary cultural elasticity, rarely repeating themselves even when recited verbatim from a book," their materiality is one thing that seems to vary little, if at all (Tatar, *Secrets* 12). Red Riding Hood always wears a red cape and carries baked goods, Bluebeard's beard is always blue, the key is always bloodstained and Bluebeard's knife is sharpened—or is it? These objects bear great symbolic weight in Perrault's and the Grimms' print versions of the tales, and become fascinating shifting signifiers in a comparative study of the tales. Following their trajectories, their shifts, and their growing pains from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries into Plath's and Pizarnik's twentieth century reworkings of Bluebeard and Little Red Riding Hood tales again illuminates these writers as contributors to the genre of postmodern fairy tales. This study also highlights their pieces as meditations on feminine agency as it relates to appetite, which encompasses desire and creativity (Chapter 2); and feminine endurance, which involves intrepidness and curiosity (Chapter 3).

Chapter 2 focuses on the salient signifier from the Red Riding Hood narratives: the red cape. Charles Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge," (1697) the Brothers Grimms' "Rotkäppchen," (1812) and "The Grandmother's Tale," an oral tale published by Paul Delarue in 1951, provide background for the twentieth century rewrites in question: Sylvia Plath's short story "Stone Boy with Dolphin" (1957) and Alejandra Pizarnik's prose poem, "La verdad del bosque" ("The Truth of the Forest") (1966). "The Grandmother's Tale," hailed by some scholars as the oral version of "Little Red Riding Hood" that precedes Perrault's 1697 publication of "Le petit chaperon rouge," presents audiences with a bawdy striptease scene. In this drawn out episode of disrobing, a young peasant girl tosses pieces of clothing into the fire one by one before a werewolf in her

grandmother's home, and eventually escapes. Because this striptease is condensed in Perrault's version and nonexistent in the Grimms', some scholars claim that this element of the tale "disappeared" completely in the classical period of tale writing, the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, not to return until the late twentieth century. To say the striptease literally "disappeared" may assume that the term has a fixed, intrinsic definition where clothing is an integral prop for the tease. Seen figuratively, however, the tropes "stripping" and "teasing" come up everywhere in the classical tradition. They especially resonate with Red Riding Hood tales as stories of nakedness and desire, particularly as they relate to appetite.

Pizarnik and Plath draw from these stripping and teasing elements in their reiterations. Mapping what carries through to the twentieth century versions hinges in this study on a series of metaphors related to female domesticity that serve to characterize strategies in the Red Riding Hood tales: to strip, to cook, to burn and to patch. The first metaphor, to strip, sets up the argument for considerations of the prominent and complicated presence of clothing in the tales. The red garment is such an integral aspect of the text that it both becomes (suits) and becomes (consumes) the identities of these girls in red. Considering her name as a metaphorical marker for the girls in Perrault, the Grimms, and then again in Pizarnik reveals insights about feminine agency. In each instance of the girl in the cape, the clothing asserts a different kind of force on her character. I will argue in Chapter 2 that thinking about female agency—ascribing that capacity to the little girl known traditionally for her naiveté and victimization—challenges the famous piece of clothing that tries to consume her, but ultimately, as Pizarnik and Plath show, cannot. The hood remains voracious throughout the tradition

because it is starving—insatiably hungry for the girl's identity, although it can never consume her entirely. Judith Butler's ideas on gender performance and construction of identity become useful here, because she shows that identity is not "achieved" so much as performed repeatedly, and is not entirely contingent on performance through dress. I will apply the idea of gender performance, oftentimes contingent upon clothing, to the striptease, whose definition cannot solidify and thus can be said to persist unfinished in varying states from Perrault and the Grimms, onto Pizarnik and Plath.

The first main section of the chapter, "Little Cap, Cap-less" explores Pizarnik's prose poem as it simultaneously draws from and tampers with aspects of the Grimms' "Rotkäppchen," and Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge." In her poem, "The Truth of the Forest," readers encounter the speaker already naked—prestrip or post, we wonder? The temporality of the moment remains unclear, but what emerges from Pizarnik's poem is a tribute to the power of imagination as an agent of self-creation. Pizarnik's speaker repeatedly tampers with lineage in the poem, rebels against her grandmother, leaves no space for the wolf to cross-dress, at least in her imagination, which she refers to as a "little theatre," and even lets the naked wolf devour her mother and grandmother while she survives, giving rebirth to herself. The auto-generative aspects of Pizarnik's narrator echo Pizarnik's use of the wolf-woman figure elsewhere in her work, a figure whose incantatory song is regenerative and life-giving. Pizarnik's speaker adopts female wolf-like characteristics in the poem, while overcoming the male wolf by imagining him naked and then snipping him into a paper doll, pasted into her notebook.[5] Although the speaker is naked herself, Pizarnik still refers to her as "little cap," illustrating her metaphorical

[5] Pizarnik's work is peopled with paper dolls. See, for example, "Extracción de la piedra de locura" (*Poesía*, 247).

relationship to this absent cap, as compared to Perrault's nonmetonymic one. In addition to erasing, or attempting to erase the literal if not the figurative cap, Pizarnik also erases its color. Her speaker is not "little red cap," but merely "little cap." She remains, however, quite small. As such, the littleness of the girls in Perrault and the Grimms persists, creating tension between the speaker's safe space of imagination and her smallness and her vulnerability, of which her grandmother repeatedly reminds her. Sylvia Plath's "Stone Boy with Dolphin," on the other hand, imagines an environment where red clothing proliferates, and thus amplifies its appetite.

The next section, "Patching the Havoc," considers how the protagonist of Plath's short story, Dody, plays the bigger sister to the tradition's other girls in red. A student at Newnham College in England, Dody hovers somewhere between littleness and big girl-ness as she sets out for a weekend party. As she prepares to leave her dorm room, Dody dresses in a litany of binding red accessories like belts and headbands. This scene reads like a backwards striptease, a "dress-tease" in fact, where the sheer number of her red accessories mirrors Dody's multidesirous appetite, the strongest one of the piece, and channels it outwards into the night. While the young girl in "Grandmother's Tale" strips to tease, to distract, and ultimately to save herself, Dody dresses to call attention, to tease, and to offer herself. In addition to Dody's red accessories, clothing in misuse or disuse plays a prominent symbolic role in the text. Plath's dress-tease leads the text into a reconsideration of the striptease in Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge," how the wolf may be teasing himself, and how the little red riding hood may be teasing him as well.

In Chapter 3, "Bearded Men and their Tools," the text moves from an analysis of red hoods to an exploration of blue beards and the weapons that define them. These

weapons create varied relationships with the bodies of their victims, which range from physically penetrative to figuratively and visually penetrative. These metaphorical and literal relationships to the bodies in turn reveal insights about the nature of victim and weapon-wielder. Considering the frequency of weapon-use is a particularly useful analytical approach as well, as the excess of weapons in Pizarnik's *Bloody Countess* draws attention away from the commonly studied tropes in Perrault's tale. Maria Tatar describes "Bluebeard" as an anomaly among tales like "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Sleeping Beauty," because even though it "got lost on its way from adult storytelling to children's books, the tale managed to lead a powerful literary afterlife without our ever being fully aware that its constituent parts belong to a narrative whole" (*Secrets*, 13). Perrault's "La barbe bleue," was published along with "Le petit chaperon rouge," in his 1697 collection of tales. Although it is dangerous to say Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge" serves as the urtext for the Red Riding Hood narratives, his print version of "La barbe bleue," functions as the original creation of the Bluebeard figure for fairy-tale scholarship. Perrault's story is often read as the paradigm of male oppression of female curiosity, and even sexuality. Fairy tale scholars with a psychoanalytic bent, like Bruno Bettelheim, for example, read the telltale bloodstain on the key as symbolic of sexual infidelity.[6] The trope of the stained key dominates the scholarly tradition, a curious tendency in light of other bloody symbols at work in the text: the reflective pool of blood on the floor of the forbidden chamber, and even the bloodstains left on Bluebeard's murder tools. These weapons are the objects that spill the blood and direct its flow in the "Bluebeard" corpus, and this chapter will explore how they interact with the bodies of

[6] See the chapter in Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* entitled "The Animal Groom Cycle."

their victims and the wielders themselves, thus providing new readings of their identities.

Considerations of the murder tools as they shift from Perrault to the Grimms, and then to Pizarnik's *La condesa sangrienta* (*The Bloody Countess*) (1966), Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), Sylvia Plath's "Bluebeard," (circa 1950) and Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Bluebeard's Daughter" (1940) reveal their complex relationship with their wielders, and also emphasize certain traits in these different Bluebeard characters. The murder tools are one way this study draws away from the wife's transgressions—the particular focus of psychoanalytic and feminist scholarly studies—and refocuses attention on Bluebeard himself. Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* offers the possibility of combining discussions about blood and weapons in a new figure for the tradition: a female Bluebeard.

The next section of the chapter, entitled "The Bloody Chambers," explores how *The Bloody Countess* presents a Bluebeard narrative that is hybrid in two ways, the first of which is that the bloody countess and murderous figure is a woman, the second of which is her simultaneous and paradoxical resemblance to Bluebeard's seven dead wives. Pizarnik's prose poem spans just under twenty pages while Plath's is a mere eight lines, and thus requires a more detailed and lengthy analysis than Plath's poem "Bluebeard." Pizarnik draws from the sordid tale of Countess Erzebet Bathory in her piece, a historical figure who tortured and murdered over six hundred young women in her lifetime before being sequestered in her castle in 1610. A few hundred years after her trial records were unearthed from the archives of Budapest, the Surrealist author and artist Valentine Penrose became fascinated by Bathory's story and wrote a novel based around it entitled *La comtesse sanglante.* During Pizarnik's stay in Paris from 1960-1964, when she ran in

Surrealist literary and artistic circles, she encountered Penrose's novel and began work on her own rendition of Bathory's life, also entitled *The Bloody Countess*. A comparative reading of Pizarnik's *Bloody Countess* and Perrault's "La barbe bleue," reveals insights about the motives behind Bathory's and Bluebeard's murders—namely, that they did not have or need motives.[7] Read backwards through Pizarnik's *Bloody Countess*, Bluebeard's nature as a serial killer becomes increasingly apparent. Pizarnik highlights the Countess' arsenal of torture tools at the outset of her piece, a gesture which privileges murder over the motive and, when read in tandem with Perrault, pushes the punishment of transgressive female curiosity out of the spotlight. Bathory's murderous automaton, "The Iron Virgin," blurs the boundary between human and machine, a rhetorical gesture that places her piece into dialogue with Mary de Morgan's fairy tale, "A Toy Princess." (1877). Finally, this chapter puts Pizarnik's female lead and the dark poetic spaces she lords over into dialogue with the bloody chamber in Perrault's "La barbe bleue" and the torture chamber set forth by Angela Carter in "The Bloody Chamber" to show that the trope of serial murder, more than anything the wife does in the story, sustains this tradition in fairy-tale history.

The final section of the chapter, entitled "What Bluebeard Saw," considers Sylvia Plath's poem "Bluebeard" as a piece that shifts ethical focus entirely from the dead wives to Bluebeard, and, even further, from his blue beard to his eye. Embedded in Bluebeard's gaze are three murder tools, each of which have a different relationship with the speaker and her body, each of which she rejects by repeating the line, "I am sending back the key / that let me into bluebeard's study" (305). That Plath does not capitalize "bluebeard"

[7] Both Bathory and Bluebeard have been repeatedly compared to Gilles de Rais, a historically notorious pederast and serial killer (Greenwood 129; Penrose vi).

leaves space for comparison of her Bluebeard character to the uncapitalized and non-metonymic moniker of "the little red riding hood" in Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge." By repeatedly rejecting the key, Plath's speaker demonstrates her insistent resilience and her will to survive. A similar show of endurance, as the term encompasses intrepidness and desire, takes place in Warner's short story, "Bluebeard's Daughter."

Bluebeard's daughter, Djamileh, represents a hybrid of both her father and his third wife, who died naturally in childbirth and not at the hand of her husband. While Djamileh and her new husband explore Bluebeard's castle, each must endure various stages of the other's overwhelming curiosity as they both try to enter and try to avoid Bluebeard's forbidden room, thus commenting and prompting reflection on the nature of endurance in the "Bluebeard" print tradition. This reading of Plath's killer through the lens of Warner's variation offers a new way to read the female character of Perrault's "La barbe bleue." This woman is not unfaithful or victimized but instead exhibits endurance and desire. Hers is not only a case of survival, but of living beyond constraints of the print tradition. Read in tandem with the positive conclusion of Perrault's tale, however, both Plath and Warner's pieces demonstrate more nuanced, skeptical, and playful outcomes for their heroines than the one in Perrault, whose heroine is unequivocally satisfied, monetarily and psychologically, at the end of the story.

Juxtaposing Plath and Pizarnik's engagement with classic print fairy tales and oral folk tales opens a comparative space for considering their work as contributions to fairy-tale scholarship. This study reads Pizarnik and Plath as poets in and of themselves, against each other, and as feminist writers from different traditions who share source materials. Finally, this study reads Perrault and the Grimms back through Pizarnik and

Plath's work, which helps to provide a strategy for reading these classics differently. Without their reworkings of fairy tales, some rich nuances of Perrault and the Grimms may go unnoticed. In other words, Plath and Pizarnik make a broader contribution to fairy-tale studies and to its history because their work illuminates facets of the tales that would be otherwise unavailable. This approach marks a shift away from autobiographical approaches and psychic explorations of their work—often easy to fall into as each writer's published, unabridged journals are readily accessible and each woman certainly led a fascinating life. To approach Plath and Pizarnik in tandem through the lens of fairy tales represents a shift towards viewing their work as pieces of, to use Cristina Bacchilega's term, the worldly fairy-tale web.[8]

[8] In preface of Bacchilega's 2013 book entitled *Fairy Tales Transformed?* she writes, "I seek to underscore how activist adaptations are wielding the powers of wonder to contest the hegemony of Euro-American fairy-tale magic, and I call for a remapping of the fairy tale genre onto a worldly, not worldwide, web" (x).

CHAPTER 2

GIRLS IN (AND OUT) OF CAPES

In Search of the Striptease

As the tale of a little girl in and out of her crimson cape carries forward from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, some aspects of the story persist while others do not—but one thing that arguably remains is her tenacious red garment. Mapping the marks and scars of Charles Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge,"[9] (1697) and the Brothers Grimms' "Rotkäppchen" (1812) through Sylvia Plath's short story "Stone Boy with Dolphin" (1957) and Alejandra Pizarnik's prose poem "La verdad del bosque" ("The Truth of the Forest") (1966) turns on a series of verbs related to female domesticity: to strip, to cook, to burn and to patch. To approach these stories in a progression from the first to the last domestic gesture creates a comparative space from which to consider Plath and Pizarnik's narratives as a collection of meditations on the feminine—and specifically feminine appetite. As it shapes identity, female desire is linked to food, sex and, inextricably, to clothing. Plath and Pizarnik's reincarnations of this tale, when read in

[9] Perrault's tale will be referred to by its original French title, "Le petit chaperon rouge." The Grimm's tale will be referred to as "Rotkäppchen," and as this paper theorizes the young girl herself is actually nameless, she will be referred to as "the girl," "the young girl," and "the little red riding hood," or "little red cap," in reference to Perrault and the Grimms' tales, respectively. "Red Riding Hood" will be used to refer to the tale type as a general group, in reference both the traditional and twentieth century versions.

tandem with Perrault, the Grimms, and what many claim is an oral predecessor of Perrault, "The Grandmother's Tale," illuminate the capacity for female transformation and mobility through language and gesture, especially when superficial readings of the fairy tale often starve of such qualities the girls in (and out of) red. Plath and Pizarnik call attention to these transformative capacities as they reemploy the tale to unearth and expand the scope of female identity through the figure of Red Riding Hood, lauding their creative and multidesirous natures. Their prose, when read comparatively, strips, cooks, burns and finally patches earlier meditations on feminine appetite into a feisty and optimistic manifesto for girls in (and out) of red everywhere.

The first act, to strip, draws on the prominent and complicated presence of clothing in all five Red Riding Hood narratives treated here. In their introduction to *Transgressive Tales,* Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill speak to the tale's emphasis on (un)dress:

> by the time 'Little Red Cap' had been worked over, by Charles Perrault at the end of the seventeenth century, then by the Grimms at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Red's bawdy striptease for the wolf masquerading as grandmother had disappeared. (2)

Turner and Greenhill likely refer to the oral tales that resemble Red Riding Hood, "The Grandmother's Tale" being one of them, and their common striptease scenes as what have been "worked over" and have eventually disappeared. In "The Grandmother's Tale," the young girl removes her items of clothing slowly and one by one, tosses them into the fire, and finally escapes the hungry wolf, or werewolf.[10] The little red riding hood also

[10] Cristina Bacchilega describes how, "in the folkloric tradition...During the winter in the French, Tirolian, and Italian Alps, wolves were an actual danger to peasants, and their children especially...The belief in werewolves was also particularly strong in these mountain areas" (*Postmodern Fairy Tales* 55).

removes her hood in Perrault, but the gesture that allows her to reach a state of "dés-habillé," occurs considerably more quickly in “Le petit chaperon rouge” than "The Grandmother's Tale," and as such Turner and Greenhill do not consider the scene a true striptease. By contrast, the Grimms' "Rotkäppchen" leaves the girl no time to discard her red cap before the wolf gobbles her up. Turner and Greenhill seem to use the term "striptease" in reference to these scenes of clothing removal, but leave little room for considerations of figurative and relocated stripteases in both Perrault and the Grimms.

While it is true that in a critical sense of the term "striptease," items of clothing should serve as fundamental props, the word "strip," can also lend itself to metaphorical strippings of titles and identities.[11] In this light, Turner and Greenhill’s use of the term “disappeared” rings too final. Myriad permutations and replacings of both the strip and the tease arguably persist in Perrault’s and the Grimms’ versions of the tale, permutations that Pizarnik and Plath draw from them in their twentieth century rewritings. These permutations and relocations do not necessarily involve clothing, but inevitably refer to the hood, the cap and the cape as creative and destructive agents in the narratives. Plath’s and Pizarnik’s twentieth century do-overs engage in reiterations, reviewings, and rereadings of the strip and the tease, and as such literally and figuratively revolve around the one pivotal garment that does not, in fact, disappear. The cape is such a foundational element of the text that we will first consider how it both becomes (suits) the girl in red and becomes (transforms and consumes) her in these seventeenth and nineteenth century tales to better understand what carries forward to the twentieth.

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[11] In Judith Butler’s foundational text for queer theory, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” the belief that a priori titles and identities exist could be considered a tease within itself.

Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge" spans no more than a few pages, so each small action and each word has garnered meticulous scholarly attention. Perrault's tale is that of a young "country girl, the prettiest you ever did see," whose grandmother gifted her a tufted red bonnet that "suited her so well...everyone called her the little red riding hood" (MT 175).[12] One day, the little red riding hood's mother directs her to take her ailing grandmother "a galette and a small jar of butter" (MT 175). She obediently sets off and quickly runs into the "neighborhood wolf," who desires very much to eat her up but instead asks where she is going. Because the young girl "didn't know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves," she fills him in on her travel plans (MT 175). The wolf invites himself along and challenges the little red riding hood to a race, but the girl seems to decline and instead spends time wandering in the woods and picking flowers. As such, the neighborhood wolf arrives first. When the grandmother invites him in, believing her granddaughter has come to visit, he devours "her in a flash" (MT 176). The little red riding hood arrives later and knocks, but hears "the wolf's gruff voice and [is] afraid at first" (MT 176, insert mine). Instead of trusting her instincts, the girl pulls "the pin and loose[ns] the latch" (MT 176, insert mine). She enters, takes off her clothes and gets into bed with the wolf. Their notorious exchange ensues, where she sizes up the wolf's arms, legs, ears and eyes before she gets to his teeth, "and with that, the wolf threw himself at the little red riding hood and ate her" (MT 176).

In Christine A. Jones' translation of Perrault's tale, cited above from *Marvelous Transformations,* she provides a clever footnote that sets the scene for critical

[12] "MT" will be used in citations to indicate Christine A. Jones' translation of Perrault and other selections from *Marvelous Transformations*, edited by Jones and Jennifer Schacker.

consideration of the girl's transformation by alluding to the red garment's agency: "while it is not uncommon for characters in French fairy tales to be called only by their title or salient feature…it is rare that a heroine should have a descriptor that is not capitalized" (MT 175). That Perrault does not capitalize the little red riding hood's name in this, the first printed version of the text, privileges the role of the garment and other clothing in the tale to a point where their stories and pasts become shaping agents in the narrative. The hood's origin becomes of high import.[13] While references to its origin do not read clearly, Perrault offers helpful information on its past by describing the girl's interactions with her hood throughout the tale.

Perrault's language suggests the garment is so beloved and frequently worn it has become a part of the young girl: "it suited her so well that everyone called her the little red riding hood" (MT 175). The hood's relationship to the young girl has been translated somewhat differently elsewhere. J.E. Mansion's 1922 English translation of Perrault, which relies on Robert Samber's 1729 translation, explains that the riding hood "became the girl so extremely well" (Mansion 23). He follows with the suggestion that the hood functions metonymically by capitalizing it and removing its article "the" in "Red Riding Hood." It is not possible to settle on any one authoritative version of precise diction surrounding the hood's relationship to the girl, yet it is possible to argue that this garment engages her, speaks to her, melds with her—indeed, as the 1922 translator suggests, becomes her.[14]

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[13] Translators constantly debate the origin of the hood, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

[14] Some scholars say R.S. Gent and "Robert Samber Gentlemen" are the same man, Samber being the tale's first English translator in 1729. Samber's translations were reproduced throughout most of the eighteenth century, but some catalogues do list R.S.

As she becomes the hood, the girl's identity weakens until it threatens to disappear. Her apparently subservient relationship to this garment supports common stereotypes that deem the girl a victim, passive, inert and a generally consumable piece of flesh; and in such readings the young girl's raw innocence dooms her as prey from the start.[15] Assertions that she has been "seduced" render her passive as well—subject to the verb, the seducer.[16] The eighteenth century reading signals that Perrault's hood may become this girl, take over her character. The fact that the hood incorporates and consumes her as a part of its 'self' in turn allows for exploration of one more nuanced way in which she is lunchmeat. Yet, Perrault arguably throws her a bone—a shard of will—that does revolve specifically around the hood, and mapping the girl's few acts of volition challenges these helpless monikers. Although the red garment consumes her identity, this is nonetheless a repeatedly transformative moment for the little red riding hood. There is something marvelous about her transformation into this garment, and understanding it turns on further exploration of the consuming hood's past.

As previously mentioned, Perrault's language surrounding the garment's origin reads ambiguously, and does so in more ways than one. Some translations imply the girl's grandmother crafted the hood herself, while others insist she had it made for her

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Gent as a separate translator. Thomas Bodkin explains in the introduction to the 1922 English translation of Perrault's tales, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, cited above, that his translator, Mansion, relied on and "revised" Samber's 1796 translation, due to its "unquestioned literary preeminence" (19).

[15] See Bruno Bettelheim's chapter on "Little Red Riding Hood" in *The Uses of Enchantment* for a discussion of her as a "naïve, attractive young girl," and "helplessly incapacitated by the consequences of her encounter with the wolf" (169, 170).

[16] In " 'Little Red Riding Hood' as Male Creation" from Alan Dundes' *Little Red Riding Hood: a Casebook*, Jack Zipes calls the popularity of the tale a "bourgeois Red Riding Hood syndrome… 'virtue seduced'" (124).

granddaughter by an unknown third party.[17] What holds in either case is the specificity of the hood's intended wearer—it is written as a tailor-made piece to clothe only the delicacy that is the little red riding hood. Perrault emphasizes the importance of the grandmother's gifting gesture by drawing a connection between girl and grandmother that supersedes the bond between girl and mother. He implies that their connection is stronger based on the exchange of this red hood: "her mother was crazy about her and her grandmother crazier still" (MT 175). The red hood does two things: connects the little red riding hood deeply with her grandmother and enjoys a very specific appetite for the young girl alone. As the hood gnaws away at her identity, however, it does not completely negate her displays of volition.

In Perrault, the little red riding hood's first exhibition of will permits the second, where she separates her body from the tenacious hood—arguably a condensed version of the "striptease" mentioned by Turner and Greenhill. Before this scene, the wolf has challenged the girl to race to her grandmother's and steered her towards the longer path. She obeys but does not rush, and instead chooses to spend her time "happily picking hazelnuts, running after butterflies, and making bouquets with tiny flowers she found" (MT 175). This dalliance is a choice and it is transformative—perhaps more so than her experience wearing and nearly being devoured by the red garment. While the little red riding hood is first described as a "poor girl, who didn't know that it is dangerous to stop and listen to wolves," when she arrives to her grandmother's house she "heard the wolf's

[17] Jack Zipes' translation of Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood," in *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* reads, "the good woman made her a little red hood" (91). Christine Jones' translation in *Marvelous Transformations* reads, "The older woman had made-to-fit for her a tufted red bonnet with a short scarf attached that cloaked her shoulders" (175).

gruff voice and was afraid at first" (MT 176). During her time collecting and wandering in circles the young girl comes to fear the wolf, and this fear could be her saving grace.

The girl does not, however, trust her newfound intuition. The wolf's soft tone quickly quells her fears, and the girl chooses to believe little more than benign illness alters her grandmother's voice: "she figured her grandmother must have gotten the flu" (MT 176).[18] Outside her grandmother's home, the little red riding hood is on territory associated with the cape. Its gifter, the good woman who is crazy for her granddaughter, lies just beyond the door, and the girl both wants to find and does find safety in this proximity—her later actions may even lead us to believe she enjoys a sense of abandon here, which in turn compels her to amplify their closeness by getting into her grandmother's bed. This moment of abandon occurs when the little red riding hood casts off her garment, and she sheds many things when she does so. When Perrault draws a deep connection between girl and grandmother based on the hood, he stitches transformative and regenerative power into the piece, and this makes the young girl all the more vulnerable when she sheds it of her own volition: "the little red riding hood takes off her clothes and gets into bed" (MT 176). Notably, the wolf in granny guise suggests only that the girl come to bed and not that she remove her clothing (MT 176). For a girl who has done little more than follow directions up to this point her response is a bold one, even brazen. She is not the first one to change clothes, however, as the wolf awaits the little red riding hood in a state of cross-dress that has not been ignored by

[18] In Jack Zipes' translation of Perrault from *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* there is no "figuring" on the part of the little red riding hood involved, only more obedience to the wolf on her part (193).

scholars.[19]

As mentioned above, the girl believes her cloak hits the ground safely because it does so in the presence of the same one who gifted it. In a sense she is not mistaken, and a layering of dress occurs that makes this possible: grandmother wears wolf (un)wears bedclothes.[20] In keeping with the voracious nature of clothing in the story, the cross-dressing wolf dons the grandmother's clothing in the hopes that he will be swallowed by her identity just long enough to fool the little red riding hood, and he succeeds.[21] The garments' voracity, however, is such because it is never quite satisfied, as the girl's acts of volition demonstrate. The wolf, too, emerges from his costumed role as grandmother when he bares his sizable teeth and eats the little red riding hood. Yet, the tale does suggest that if the wolf can fleetingly wear grandmother simply by wearing her bedclothes, by adopting her state of undressedness, then the girl and her grandmother certainly wear wolf when they meet inside his stomach. It is here that the young girl and grandmother finally share their closets; and when all is teased and stripped, the girl has inadvertently saved her red hood from the wolf. The discarded garment raises two questions: Whom will the little red riding hood abandoned on this good woman's floor become now? Who will satisfy its appetite for identity?

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[19] See Catherine Orenstein's chapter in *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked* entitled "Riding-Hood Redux: the Cross-Dressing Wolf," for example.

[20] In the original French, Perrault uses the expression "en son déshabille" to describe the grandmother's state of dress as one of "undressed-ness," loosely or carelessly dressed, and the little red riding hood might discard her clothing to match the "undressed" state of her grandmother.

[21] I adopt the descriptor "voracious" to signal the insatiable nature of the hood's hunger. While the hood nearly "consumes" the girl's identity and renders her nameless, her acts of volition, one of which is to cast off the hood in Perrault, counteract her status as lunchmeat. Judith Butler's theories on gender performance are helpful in understanding why the hood is always hungry, and will be discussed later in the chapter.

In considering their implications, it is worth noting that these questions only come about through the starving of the hood, which does not happen in the Grimms' "Rotkäppchen." The brothers instead present the garment as a delicacy on par with little red cap's flesh and provide the girl no time to remove her cap before the wolf falls upon her. It is a glint of half-digested redness from within the wolf's stomach that encourages the savior-huntsman to continue snipping in search of little red cap and her grandmother. The wolf, who had such an appetite for clothing and the bodies it cloaks throughout "Rotkäppchen," becomes clothing himself in the end of some versions of the Grimms.

The Grimms' German "Rotkäppchen," or "Little Red Cap," appeared in the first volume of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in 1812. The tale begins by describing a grandmother's undying love for her granddaughter, and how "she was always giving her gifts" (Tatar, *Annotated* 143). In Maria Tatar's translation, it is the grandmother who crafts the "little hood of red velvet," but, as previously mentioned, translators often debate the cloak's origin. The velvet hood suited the Grimms' girl so well that she "wanted to wear it all the time, and so she came to be called Little Red Riding Hood" (Tatar 143). One day, the girl's mother directs her to take her sick grandmother some cakes and a bottle of wine. She also reminds her to behave "like a good little girl," not to stray from the path, and to remember her manners once she arrives (143). Not two steps into the woods she meets the wolf, and naively feels not the least bit afraid. As in Perrault, little red cap describes the location of her grandmother's house to the wolf. He decides to walk alongside her for a while, considering how she will make a lovely snack, and attempts to distract her by diverting her attention to all the beautiful flowers and birds in the woods. He chides her for behaving as if she were on her way to school. Little red

cap, entranced by the forest, decides to pick a bouquet for her grandmother and wanders even deeper into the woods.[22] Meanwhile, the wolf arrives at her grandmother's door and claims he is little red cap bringing cakes and wine. "Just lift the latch," responds Grandmother, and the wolf gobbles her up. The young girl arrives, and intuitively takes note of the strange atmosphere. Nonetheless, she enters the house and the notorious exchange ensues; it ends with little red cap meeting her grandmother inside the wolf's stomach.

The wolf, satisfied, falls asleep in bed and begins to snore, after which the Grimms tack on a scene of salvation that does not occur in Perrault. A hunter-savior wanders by the house and is alarmed by how loudly the old woman is snoring. He enters, finds the wolf, the "old sinner," but thinks twice before shooting him. The hunter instead performs a caesarian section on the wolf's stomach, rescuing intact both little red cap and her grandmother. The young girl fills the wolf's stomach with stones, so that when he awakens and tries to run away he falls down dead. Next, the huntsman skins the wolf and takes his pelt home, Grandmother dines on cakes and wine, and little red cap tells herself that she will never again stray from her path. Little red cap wears her hood throughout the entirety of the Grimms' version of the tale, even while inside the wolf's stomach, which is a choice that perhaps reflects their decision to capitalize little red cap and thus employ the phrase metonymically. That is to say, the Grimm's hood is less voracious than Perrault's.

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[22] As Maria Tatar notes in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, "For Bruno Bettelheim, the desire for the flowers points to the child's investment in the pleasure principle. The tale addresses the ambivalence about 'whether to live by the pleasure principle or the reality principle,'" where the reality principle involves the "postponement of satisfaction…and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the…road toward pleasure" (Tatar 145; Freud 10).

In Perrault, conversely, his choice to have the girl discard her hood relates directly to his choice to leave her name uncapitalized and nonmetonymic. By doing so he suggests that the little red riding hood is figuratively consumed by the garment long before she is eaten by the wolf. The moment where the hood leaves her body becomes a stronger gesture due to this prior stripping of identity, because it marks a shift in the hierarchy of appetites in the text. When the girl discards her hood she arguably intends to starve it and recapitalize on or figuratively feed some part of her "self." By starving the cape she denies *its* appetite and caters instead to one or more appetites present during Perrault's final scene: the wolf's, the bedclothes (as they have become and consumed the wolf), the grandmother's, and her own.[23] In the world of the tale, then, to dress might be akin to being eaten. In his opening lines that signal the importance of the hood's appetite, Perrault also signals the integral role of more general appetite in the text—and it is not only the wolf who is hungry. When scholars speak of metaphorical appetites in the Red Riding Hood tales they often conflate desire for food with desire for sex, but we might consider that each of these hinge on desire for and desire of dress. Perrault's non-metonymic title, which consumes the young girl's identity, then represents the appetite of the garment itself in addition to those of all garments as they cloak and consume bodies in the text.

Turner and Greenhill expand on this interrelation of food and sex in Red Riding Hood narratives:

> …the wolf's intentions toward Red may be understood as fulfilling desires for food, for sex, or for both. As eloquently argued by Rosalind Coward, food and

[23] This strong act of volition corresponds to the "striptease" in "The Grandmother's Tale," although it seems considerably shortened in Perrault's version, as scholars have noted.

> sex inter-refer in many aspects of Euro-North American discourse, from the terms of endearment…to the ways in which appetites for food and sex are equally deemed illicit and pornographic, especially for women. (8)

Their reading, while helpful, does not include dress. The garments' capacity to consume or partially consume identities in Red Riding Hood narratives, and more generally, to serve as a prop in gender and sex performance cannot be overlooked. When Perrault points to the pivotal role of the voracious garment, he also accesses how clothing that consumes repeatedly takes its wearer further and further from an unfixed self as it simultaneously becomes a tool for the wearer to seek her fixed essence. In other words, the more clothing consumes bodies and identities, the more it becomes a broken tool to access identity. Fittingly, these broken tools are what the young heroine in "The Grandmother's Tale" cooks and burns to a crisp. It is this cooking gesture that helps her to escape the werewolf in the folktale, often credited as the oral predecessor of Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge."

While the two narratives have many similarities, the fact that French folklorist Paul Delarue published and named "The Grandmother's Tale" in 1951, three centuries following Perrault's 1697 version, makes it difficult to speculate on its precise relation to Red Riding Hood's various incarnations over time.[24] Other tales from around the world, such as the Italian "False Grandmother" or the Chinese "Lon Po Po" in part make up the set of oral incarnations, or what Catherine Orenstein refers to as Red Riding Hood's "global sisterhood of oral tales" (70). The printed Perrault and Grimm versions discussed

[24] Catherine Orenstein notes the "nearly identical" tales that were brought to light elsewhere in Europe and around the world in her chapter "The Grandmother's Tale" from *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked* : "bawdy and gruesome, these oral tales share themes of cannibalism, sexuality, defecation, mistaken identity, and an encounter in bed with a dangerous foe" (69).

thus far do not dialogue with this sisterhood of cognates—textual blood relatives— and their content differs as well. In the cognates presumed to draw on older oral traditions, the young girl's sexuality and self-possession are markedly different from how they appear in both Perrault and the Grimms' versions; indeed, they are what allow her to escape the wolf altogether. Orenstein affirms that the repeatedly triumphant heroine "is no mere incidental motif…its recurrence suggests that it is fundamental" to the story's genetics (77). "The Grandmother's Tale" also serves up a lengthy and bawdy striptease, more literal and more purposeful than in Perrault's and the Grimms' texts, which plays a large part in the girl's ability to escape the wolf. Delarue's notes on the oral strategies of storytellers emphasize the drawn out nature of her striptease.

In "The Grandmother's Tale," when the "bzou," or werewolf, commands the young girl to, "Undress, my child, and come and sleep beside me," her response is, "Where should I put my apron?" (Dundes 15). The girl asks not, "Where should I put my clothes?" but begins with an external layer of clothing that allows her to proceed slowly from apron to bodice to dress to skirt to hose. Delarue makes a note in his collection to inform readers that, "for each item of clothing the teller repeats the question of the girl and the reply of the wolf," which is, "throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it any more" (Dundes 15). The wolf repeats the command a total of five times in the tale, almost as if he is hungry for burnt bodices rather than raw girl-flesh.

As made evident by her summary of the folk tale in relation to the fairy tale, Maria Tatar is one scholar who reads "The Story of the Grandmother" as a predecessor to Perrault:

> …early versions of her story, told around the fireside or in taverns, show a shrewd young heroine who does not need to rely on hunters to escape the wolf and to find

> her way back home. In "The Story of Grandmother," an oral version of the tale recorded in France at the end of the nineteenth century, Little Red Riding Hood performs a striptease before the wolf, and then ends the litany of questions about the wolf's body parts by asking if she can go outside to relieve herself. The wolf is outwitted by Little Red Riding Hood. (*Annotated,* 141)

Tatar's use of the word "performance" in reference to the striptease in "The Grandmother's Tale" is key. As discussed previously, the interrelation of food and sex in the print Red Riding Hood tales turns on understanding the role of the voracious hood, desire for and of dress, and clothing's role as a prop for performance.[25] With this in mind, we might read the young girl's lengthy striptease as a performance of food preparation, especially because she throws her clothes in the fire and "cooks" them, as if apron, bodice, skirt, petticoat, and stockings are raw meat. If a bodice and petticoat are raw, unfinished, and broken shapers and agents of identity, then to "cook" them, burn them, and transform them into smoke is to complete them in their metaphorical death by fire. To cook them calls attention to their binding capacities—physically, sexually, and as markers of gender. That is to say, the young girl's striptease in "Grandmother's Tale" is unique in that she incinerates her clothing—a gesture that liberates her from the consuming capacity of clothing even further than her other sisters in red, whose hoods survive.

By cooking her apron the young girl also exhibits a sort of backwards appetite for clothing, and Freud's concept of the death drive is helpful in detailing this gesture.[26] The

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[25] Recall also that in the Grimms the garment becomes just as much an object of the wolf's appetite as the girl herself, because she has no time to remove it before being eaten.

[26] The peasant girl in "The Grandmother's Tale," and her "backward appetite" call to mind Sigmund Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and the concept of the "death drive." Recall that Bettelheim has linked the girl's desire for flowers to the pleasure

death drive especially comes across in the repetitive action of throwing clothes away from her body and into the fire, a gesture that resembles the confounding, pleasurable "compulsion to repeat" described by Freud. That she throws clothing also recalls the game Freud describes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" where his grandson throws toys into the corners of the home to restage the "distressing experience" of his mother's departure. The child's gesture involves a return of the discarded objects while the peasant girl's does not—instead, they burn. In fact, she tosses her clothing to the fire with an abandon that resembles the little red riding hood's brazen choice to discard her hood in Perrault.[27]

Again, it is this carefree gesture that causes her clothing not to cook but to burn, irretrievably lost, and as each stocking gets crispy the girl approaches a break from the repetitive ritual of dress/undress and its shaping effects on desire. Red Riding Hood's traditional affinity for her hood implies that she dons and removes this preferred garment on a daily basis, and the implied repetition lends itself to an exploration of how clothing shapes and genders bodies beneath it in the story, much like the peasant girl's prior to the cooking scene in "Grandmother's Tale." For Judith Butler, indeed, gender identity is "tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (900). The little red riding hood's choice to don the beloved garment again and again in Perrault exemplifies the act Butler discusses. This act of constructing identity, however, does not stop when the hood leaves her body and is thus does not entirely

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principle, and that it is possible to link the girl in "The Grandmother's Tale" to the death drive.

[27] Recall that the little red riding hood might discard her voracious hood in favor of another's appetite, but to whom the privileged appetite belongs is ambiguous. In the case of "The Grandmother's Tale," we might say the peasant girl privileges her own appetite.

depend on the garment. That is to say, the performance does not simply begin once one is dressed and end when she is naked. Furthermore, there is no anterior realm where gender was constructed, and no subject who is free from the realm of gender.

Consequently, identity categories like gender are impossible to stabilize by reiterating dress. The same is true for the striptease in Red Riding Hood narratives, whose definition cannot solidify and thus persists from Perrault to the Grimms and on to Pizarnik and Plath. Turner and Greenhill appear to assume such a definition exists when they claim the striptease has "disappeared," but the gesture consistently resurfaces and troubles this claim. Its reiterative acts are performances for which there is no original script. That is to say, there is no prior definition or gender to access in Red Riding Hood narratives through the repeated strip and tease, although one way in which the body does bear the "complicated process of appropriation" is through clothing (Butler 901).

Again, it is not possible to access gender through the stripteases in stories about Red Riding Hood because gender is not a choice. It instead depends on deeply engrained performative acts, which often reiterate social norms that can be painful or oppressive. As such, bodies and identities bear the complicated process of appropriation, which is in part a painful one. In other words, they do not shed marks or scars of clothing the moment they discard the textiles themselves. To shed these marks would be a gesture considerably more fraught and complicated than discarding the voracious hood, as what persists are changed bodies, constantly in formation, like that of the peasant girl who escapes the wolf in "Grandmother's Tale." She frees herself from the bonds of apron, bodice, dress and hose but bears the marks of clothing, and departs from her readers in a naked state much like the speaker in Alejandra Pizarnik's poem "Truth of the Forest,"

who, like a naked little cap, traverses the desert of childhood (Pizarnik 34). Her performances revolve around a lack of clothing, but Pizarnik's speaker does not fail to find props elsewhere.

Little Cap, Cap-less

Red Riding Hood is the most widely reworked fairy-tale character among twentieth century Argentine women writers.[28] Like many of her contemporaries, such as Victoria Ocampo and Luisa Valenzuela, it seems that Alejandra Pizarnik reads Perrault's little red riding hood "as being too naïve, sweet, and passive by far; [she] makes her more self-determining, in charge of body, actions, and desires" (Mackintosh, *Babes* 152). One way in which she does so is to create a refuge for "little cap,"[29] an imaginative space of self-creation set in a state of temporal suspension. It is these different planes of space and time in Pizarnik's poem that allow the previously mentioned props to function uniquely from those of other Red Riding Hoods discussed in the chapter.

Pizarnik begins her prose poem, "The Truth of the Forest," with an abstract description of space. The lengthy opening sentence lacks action—Pizarnik uses no verbs and relies heavily on comparative adjectives: "like a gulf of suns this enclosed, transparent space" (34).[30] The absence of verbs leaves Pizarnik's prose floating in a kind of radical present. As such, of particular importance is the fact that Perrault changes the

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[28] See Fiona Mackintosh's chapter from *Fairy Tales and Feminism* entitled "Babes in the *Bosque*: Fairy Tales in Twentieth-Century Argentine Women's Writing" (152).
[29] "caperucita."
[30] "como un golfo de soles este espacio hermético y transparente." Note that all quoted lines from "The Truth of the Forest" appear on page 34 of Pizarnik's *Prosa Completa*. Maria Tatar notes in *The Annotated Grimms* how "Little Red Riding Hood has…been interpreted as a figure that symbolizes the sun, engulfed by the night and reemerging at dawn" (Tatar 146).

narrative tense in "Le petit chaperon rouge" from past to present just as the little red riding hood begins to remove her clothing:

> Perrault shifts to the present for a line or two in several of his tales. The present marks a significant moment in the narrative and puts the reader into the time of the action, as though we bear witness to it. This also suggests the expectation of reading aloud. (MT 176)

Before making an analysis of the poem's temporality, it is worth noting that Pizarnik was likely familiar with a translated version of Perrault's tale before her journey to Paris, where she lived and ran in artistic and Surrealist circles from 1960 until 1964. Volume 7 of the *Index Translationem* shows among its 1956 translations for Argentina Perrault's "Le petit chaperon rouge," and it is probable that Pizarnik became acquainted with the tale at some point in the late 1950s (Mackintosh 150).[31] Consequently, Pizarnik may quite deliberately adopt and adapt Perrault's narrative style when she shifts from the tense-less temporality of her first paragraph to the present tense in her second paragraph. She bypasses past tense in this transition and even bypasses the moment in Perrault where the little red riding hood sheds her clothes, as Pizarnik's readers come upon her character already naked and traversing her childhood like "caperucita" traversed the woods.

Again, Pizarnik's adoption of Perrault's style is also an adaption. Unlike Perrault, Pizarnik does not utilize the present tense to signal the importance of the little red riding hood's condensed striptease. She shifts to present tense to call attention to an abstract space of imagination, which plays a prominent role in the world of her poem: "the action happens in the desert,"[32] arguably in the "gulf of suns" she describes previously. Pizarnik later shifts back to past tense during her description of the young girl's journey through

[31] Note that "La verdad del bosque" was written in 1966.
[32] "La acción transcurre en el desierto."

childhood. Though it is implied the girl's childhood is comparable to the journey through the woods in Red Riding Hood narratives, her journey could arguably take place in that imaginative, abstract and impenetrable space described in the first lines of the poem, which is not quite a forest: "I journeyed through my childhood like little cap through the woods before the ferocious encounter."[33] In a departure from Perrault's or the Grimms' versions, Pizarnik's speaker is safe from the wolf in this deserted landscape and the time before the ferocious encounter. Her grandmother's voice, however, will later affirm the existence of the dangerous wolf. She interrupts the speaker's imaginative musings with chiding questions, which is quite reminiscent of the nagging mother figure from the Grimms' "Rotkäppchen."

The grandmother in Pizarnik's poem introduces the wolf by interjecting midsentence, a verbal gesture all the more jarring for her shift from present to past tense prose: "But they devoured us all, because what good are words if they can't confirm that they devoured us? – said the grandmother."[34] It is as if the grandmother cannot allow the young girl to be safe. She insists on the devouring capabilities of the wolf, and even pluralizes him into a male they. The grandmother and speaker's choice to gender the wolf is interesting in light of Pizarnik's general oeuvre, because the figure of the wolf woman proliferates elsewhere in her work. Fiona Mackintosh speculates on Pizarnik's repeated use of the wolf woman symbol, which represents a regenerative and transformative life force based on those seen in traditional tales, who collect:

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[33] "atravesé mi infancia como caperucita el bosque antes el encuentro feroz." Recall that in Perrault the little red riding hood's journey through the woods is a transformative one. When she indulges her curiosity by picking nosegays and chasing butterflies, the little red riding hood undergoes some change that causes her to fear the wolf.

[34] "pero nos devoraron a todos porque ¿para qué sirven las palabras si no pueden constatar que nos devoraron? – dijo la abuela."

> the bones of wolves and rebuild the skeleton. [They] then sing, and the power of her song fleshes out the bones. The wolf opens its eyes, runs away, and is changed into a laughing woman. (157)

Mackintosh reads the grandmother's claim that everyone was devoured as a verbal gesture that shatters the narrative frame (160). Pizarnik's poem, however, comments on ancestry, afterlife, and imagination through its use of clothing and color in ways that challenge the conclusively destructive end to Perrault's tale, which Mackintosh's analysis of the poem seems to perpetuate.

Mackintosh's reading loyally portrays the deadly male wolf in Red Riding Hood narratives, the same figure set forth by Pizarnik's grandmother character; yet, the imaginative space, which is also a safe space, survives until the end of the piece through the mind and voice of its young female speaker—it is not devoured. Similarly to the way that Plath's protagonist in "Stone Boy with Dolphin," adopts male wolf-like tendencies, which will be discussed later, so does Pizarnik's speaker engage in *female* wolf-like behavior as she calls herself back to life through language and imagination. Mackintosh provides helpful ideas on why Pizarnik might be drawn to the incantatory and life-giving words of the female wolf figure: "in her poetry she continually strives for language that is inhabited rather than empty, for words that are actions like the wolf-woman's powerful song" (157). For this reason, "The Truth of the Forest," seems worthy of a space in the collection of Pizarnik's pieces that make reference to regenerative female wolf figures, some of which include *The Bloody Countess*, "Works and Nights," and "Fragments to Dominate Silence." It is through the speaker's imaginative space—created by language floating in a radical present—that she survives in both mind and body by the end of the poem. That Pizarnik writes a Red Riding Hood character who saves herself through

imaginative language seems to serve her poetic quest for words that act. Her speaker's imagination is not the only one at play, however, as Pizarnik continues to give voice to the grandmother's imagination as well.

In the grandmother's version of the story, the creation of a safe space through words is unnecessary and futile. She pluralizes the male wolf into wolves, the ones that devoured us all, and in doing so implies that multiple wolves will continue to devour in a repetitive manner and reveals her lack of faith in language and imagination.[35] These linguistic and imaginative spaces dismissed by the grandmother could be described as enclosed yet transparent spaces, similar in nature to the sun-related imagery addressed at length in the first paragraph of Pizarnik's poem. The brilliant, sun-drenched symbols have interesting implications for Pizarnik's references to giving birth in the poem, which translates from the Spanish "dar a luz" as "to give to light."

While the grandmother insists on this inexplicable yet inevitable meal and insatiable lupine appetite, Pizarnik's speaker insists further on the sunny, safe and impenetrable space of her imagination. In addition to a sphere of sunshine, Pizarnik also offers the space a body and a face, but just as quickly denies the body—absents it, my dear: "A crystal sphere with sunshine inside; with a golden body (an absent one, my dear) and a head where the bluest eyes shine before the sun in the transparent sphere."[36] In the Spanish, it is clear that this body is male, "un ausente" imagined by Pizarnik's speaker in her little theatre. Like the speaker's little cap, the absent body exists at the same time it is

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[35] As many scholars note, Pizarnik grapples with this same question in various forms throughout her work, perhaps most famously in her poem "En esta noche, en este mundo": "¿si digo pan, comeré? ¿si digo agua, beberé?" (If I say bread, do I eat? If I say water, will I drink?) (*Poesía* 399).

[36] "una esfera de crystal con el sol adentro; con un cuerpo dorado (un ausente, querido tú) con una cabeza donde brillan los ojos más azules delante de sol en la esfera transparente."

missing and thus contributes to the suspended, ambiguous temporal nature invoked in the first stanza. Furthermore, Pizarnik's speaker addresses the absent body in a way that she does not address her grandmother, as if the only interlocutor she engages with exists in this ambiguous, in-between state of presence and absence. Such a reading sets the poem up for consideration of the male body as present yet absent, bolstered by Pizarnik's descriptions of her speaker in the second stanza as "well-behaved" and "well-disposed" for what reads as a sexual encounter.

As the body, the construct of the speaker's imagination, disappears, what remains are fragments: the golden head and face, adorned with its eyes—tools of perception and spheres themselves. That the spherical eyes carry through while the body does not renders the sphere a space of auto-generation, appropriately reminiscent of the wolf-woman's regenerative song. In this way, the poem attributes male physical traits, the head, face and eyes, to a female characteristic, regeneration, thus tampering with gender roles in much the same way Pizarnik's speaker tampers with genealogy. Pizarnik's punctuation and repetition of spherical shapes like heads, eyes, suns and the crystal sphere further emphasize the auto-generative nature of the speaker's imagination. The above-cited passage, "like a gulf of suns," which makes up the opening lines of the poem, describes a litany of auto-generations that occur without want or need of verbs.

As previously mentioned, this space represents a suspended, radical present. Pizarnik repeatedly implies that time does not pass in a linear manner here, which foils the very linear presentation of female genealogy given in the poem's third paragraph: "My grandmother gave my mother to light, who in turn gave me to earth, and all thanks

to my imagination."[37] The speaker's mother does not give her to light but instead gives her to earth, and although she misses out on some brilliant biological birth the speaker's imaginative space is flooded with light in the form of sunshine. It is even possible to read this space as a source of sunshine, "with the sun inside."[38] This interpretation implies that the speaker gives birth to herself, gives herself "to light," and does so consistently.[39] More might be at stake thematically in this summary of female lineage, however, as it certainly calls out to the three generations of women in the traditional Red Riding Hood narratives and does not focus only on Pizarnik's metaphorical "caperucita."

Turner and Greenhill's *Transgressive Tales* describes how the Grimms often highlight the matriarchal family line in their stories:

> Some feminist readings of the Grimm tales and their analogues would see Little Red as the victim, both sexually innocent and passive…and requiring rescue by the …phallic male huntsman. Yet female figures—Red, her mother, and her grandmother—are pivotal. Further, versions of some Grimm stories are virtually patriarch(y) free. (9)

Consider, for example, canonical texts like the Bible, where lengthy lists of males who beget males upon males are common. This is not the case in Red Riding Hood narratives, and Pizarnik seems to pick up on the Grimms' tendency to privilege female figures and matriarchal lineage. Her prose poem presents the female line and remarks on its atypical nature by describing natural and unnatural births. The speaker's mother does not give her to light but gives her to earth; she exists in a sort of unnatural, unborn state. If Red

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[37] "La abuela dio a luz a mi madre quien a su vez me dio a tierra, y todo gracias a mi imaginación."

[38] "con el sol adentro."

[39] This moment in the poem is also noteworthy for its rhythm. While the rest of Pizarnik's piece is written in prose that seems to run together, this instance recalls the rhythmic and formulaic exchange in Perrault and the Grimms about what big arms, nose, eyes and finally, teeth the wolf has. The speaker's reluctance to accept her lineage might also read as a critique of the verbal joust in the traditional tale.

Riding Hood grandmothers gift red capes, then the speaker's relationship with her grandmother is also unnatural because Pizarnik's naked granddaughter is not in receipt of a red cap. In other words, both mother and grandmother slight Pizarnik's speaker, or at the very least deviate from the roles of their traditional fairy tale counterparts. Assigning the speaker atypical ancestry is one way in which Pizarnik underscores the resourceful nature of the young girl in her poem, who is self-creative, and in doing so perhaps nods to the equally resourceful stripper in "The Grandmother's Tale."

This self-creativity ties in metaphorically to the theme of female appetite. Creation and renewal are continuous processes in the same way appetite, once sated, emerges again, and even if not sated persists all the more strongly. Pizarnik's speaker is the source of her creative appetite and her own light, and she reminds her grandmother of this capacity just after her description of their skewed female family tree. She does so by initiating a tense change to the present: "The forest is only green in the mind."[40] After this line, Pizarnik's speaker goes on to explain in past tense what happens in her imagination. Yet, the opening temporal adaptation of Perrault suspends the imaginative space of the third paragraph in time and recalls the tense-less space of the first paragraph. That the speaker and her grandmother make conflicting choices in narrative tense further illustrates the discord between grandmother and granddaughter, between lineage and self-creation. Again, Perrault uses a tense shift to emphasize the little red riding hood's disrobing scene while Pizarnik consistently uses a tense shift to emphasize the importance of her speaker's imagination. Pizarnik adopts, adapts and challenges Perrault's style, just as she seems to do with the Grimms "Rotkäppchen" later on in the

[40] "El bosque no es verde sino en el cerebro."

poem. Yet, as Pizarnik rewrites and challenges these stories, she does choose to emphasize the littleness and vulnerability of her speaker.

Like Perrault's "petit chaperon rouge," Pizarnik's "caperucita" is not capitalized: "I journeyed through childhood like little cap in the forest before the ferocious encounter."[41] This may seem, as is the case in Perrault, to render Pizarnik's speaker nameless and signal how clothing shapes or devours her identity. Yet, Pizarnik's speaker wears no cape, no cap, red or otherwise. On her journey through childhood, she carries only a basket and is "well-disposed."[42] Pizarnik uses the verb "llevar," here, which connotes both wearing and carrying the basket, inferring the accessory is all she "wears": "How alone, wearing only a basket, how innocent, how well-behaved and well-disposed."[43] Pizarnik's speaker resembles "caperucita" in her littleness and in the trajectory of her journey—not in dress. Furthermore, Perrault's character *is* the little red riding hood while Pizarnik's is like little cap. That is to say, Perrault's character has a metaphorical relationship to the garment while Pizarnik's enjoys one of comparison—she does not become (transform into) the little cap.

To sum up, the speaker's small stature in Pizarnik's poem likens her to the girls in red found in Perrault and the Grimms, while the speaker's nakedness simultaneously distances her from these ancestral narratives. To refer to the girl with "caperucita" creates tension between her littleness and the named but absent cap. Pizarnik notably compares her character to "caperucita," and not "caperucita roja," and, consequently, her choice of descriptor is colorless. The achromatic cap then calls attention to, even as it

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[41] "atravesé mi infancia como caperucita el bosque antes del encuentro feroz."
[42] "bien dispuesta."
[43] "Qué sola llevando una cesta, qué inocente, qué decorosa y bien dispuesta"

erases, Perrault's and the Grimms' insistence on the redness of the garment. Pizarnik's decision to incorporate colorful imagery elsewhere in the poem emphasizes the cap's lack of color, most consistently in sections that deal with that abstract, imaginative space: "the forest is only green in the mind,"[44] and, "where the bluest eyes shine."[45] Furthermore, where color proliferates Pizarnik's speaker is safe from the wolf and from the world.

The imaginative space indeed seems to function as a colorful retreat—it offers refuge to the cap-less "caperucita" and perhaps a place for her to discover color. The speaker theorizes this space in a separate temporal plane that differs from other Red Riding Hood narratives. The wolf never has a chance to don women's bedclothes and the young girl is naked, whereas in other tales it is their meeting at the grandmother's house that inspires the striptease. This chronological shift has two potential implications: first, it suggests the speaker's identity takes shape independently of the garment; or secondly suggests that she traverses this forest in a far more vulnerable and unidentified state than any of her cloaked sisters. Regardless, she is naked for none but herself, safe within her "esfera" from clothing, from the red garment as a potential symbol of female lineage and notably, from the wolf.

In the last paragraph of the poem, Pizarnik refers to the "esfera" as a "pequeño teatro," or a little theatre, and in doing so draws a comparison between her small speaker and this similarly small space. While it is a safe space, even a retreat as described earlier, its similarity to the little "caperucita" illustrates its insecurity. The space provides refuge, but only as long as the radical present might last. In a state of temporal suspense, the speaker acts boldly and distances her imagination from her grandmother's, as if to deny

[44] "el bosque no es verde sino en el cerebro."
[45] "donde brillan los ojos más azules."

their shared memory and history. For example, there in her little theater the speaker allows the wolf to devour both mother and grandmother. Pizarnik writes, "the male wolf devoured them,"[46] just after the summary of atypical female lineage. That the speaker's wolf devours her mother and grandmother suggests frustration with the regenerative song of the wolf-woman, and implies Pizarnik's relationship with this trope is perhaps more fraught than Mackintosh proposes.

By imagining her mother gave her to the earth instead of to light, and also by imagining that the wolf wipes out her ancestry, the poem tampers with the female lineage Turner and Greenhill read as so pivotal for Red Riding Hood. In the sense that Perrault and Grimm are the ancestral versions of Red Riding Hood narratives, further evidence of such tampering occurs in the third paragraph of the poem, which opens with, "But the wolf did not dress up in my grandmother's clothing."[47] If the wolf is naked, he has made no attempt to trick the young speaker by donning her grandmother's clothes. In fact, the speaker herself plays dress up with the wolf when she turns him into him a paper doll: "As for the wolf, I cut him out and stuck him in my schoolbook."[48] Pizarnik's mention of a schoolbook and the description of a speaker who chops up the wolf draw a link between the poem to and the ancestral Grimms' tale, and also pose a challenge to several narrative elements of their "Rotkäppchen."

In Maria Tatar's translation of the Grimms,' the wolf encourages little red cap to play in the woods and not to act as if she was on her way to school: "You act as if you

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[46] "el lobo las devoró."
[47] "Pero de la mía, no se vistió el lobo."
[48] "En cuanto al lobo, lo recorté y lo pegué en mi cuaderno escolar." Pizarnik's oeuvre is peopled with paper dolls reminiscent of the paper doll ballerina in Hans Christen Andersen's "The Steadfast Tin Soldier." See, for example "Extracción de la piedra de la locura."

were on the way to school, when it's really so much fun out here in the woods" (Tatar, *Annotated* 145). Pizarnik's poem rejects this advice when the speaker opts for self-education and glues the wolf into her school notebook. This scene in the poem privileges education over dalliance in the woods, and further supports the reading of the speaker's imaginative space, the little theatre, as a space of auto-generation where one thing "given to light" is knowledge. That Pizarnik's speaker cuts the wolf into a paper doll further connects "The Truth of the Forest" to the Grimms, where little red cap and her grandmother are cut from the wolf's belly. The hunter performs a caesarean section on the wolf, so both this Grimms' character and Pizarnik's speaker engage in creative and generative cutting actions.[49]

Pizarnik's play at wolf paper dolls then has three implications: first, that the female speaker appropriates a male-identified action; second, that Pizarnik's speaker saves herself and has no need for a savior-hunter; and finally that she assists in some gesture of birth, which ties back into the reading of her imagination as an auto-generative space. The imaginative space is then a realm free of gender, where creation, renewal and rebirth do not depend on gendered, external forces. The girl simultaneously draws from and wreaks havoc on the Grimms' tale, as she has done with Perrault's tense shifts and choice of comparative stylistics. The speaker sums up life in her theatre, in this imaginative space: "in this life, they owe me a party."[50] In this line, Pizarnik's speaker conveys her celebratory approach to imagination and its ability to tamper with the past, with both fairy tales and familial ancestry. Yet, the grandmother gets the last word and

[49] See Anne Sexton's poem "Red Riding Hood" in her collection entitled *Transformations*.
[50] "en suma, en esta vida me deben una fiesta."

reminds the girl of her imagination's smallness by chiding, "And you call this a life? – said the grandmother."[51]

Although the grandmother was devoured in the speaker's little theater, her voice resurfaces in the last line of the poem through the girl's memory. That the voice of her devoured grandmother has become part of the young girl illustrates both the inevitability of her ancestry and frustration with the regenerative wolf woman figure. Although the grandmother, or the memory of the grandmother, speaks last, the girl's rebellious nature elsewhere in the poem allows readers to speculate on her unwritten response to this last line. Thus far the poem has followed a call and response structure that suggests the speaker will continue to tamper with her ancestry. Paragraph three, for example, presents an example of how quickly Pizarnik's speaker casts off and will continue to cast off the voice of her grandmother. She pays no heed to her question, "what good are words if they can't confirm that they devoured us?"[52] as she jumps to the next idea, the wolf's nakedness, and dismisses her grandmother's query. Pizarnik writes, "but the wolf did not dress up in my grandmother's clothing."[53] The structure of the poem suggests its speaker will continue to dissect, collage and rearrange the lineage of both her own ancestry and that of traditional fairy tales in a genderless, atemporal space. She will persist in snipping up wolves, which is an act akin to food preparation and pattern drafting—wreaking and patching the havoc.

[51] "¿Y a esto llamas la vida? – dijo la abuela."
[52] "¿para qué sirven las palabras si no pueden constatar que nos devoraron?"
[53] "pero de la mía no se vistió el lobo."

Patching the Havoc

While the presence of clothing is not a strong motif in Pizarnik's poem, both clothing and its redness proliferate in Sylvia Plath's short story "Stone Boy with Dolphin."[54] Plath also differs from Pizarnik in that she does not draw on Red Riding Hood's littleness. Dody, her girl in red, is a college undergraduate who dwells not with her mother in the forest but in a dorm room at Newnham College in England, somewhere between littleness and big girl-ness. What do persist in Plath's story are the garment's redness and its appetite, which has decidedly multiplied in scope; and the litanies of red clothing Plath offers are markers of this growth.

Plath's first mention of some red permutation sets the scene for the strong motif of clothing in misuse or disrepair in the story: "she balanced her rust encrusted Raleigh and let Bamber scramble for the oranges" (173). That Dody's bicycle is covered in red rust suggests its "riding" function has been overused or poorly tended—and the same might apply to her riding clothing: "red plaid scarf and black gown whipping back in the wind" (174). Dody's clothing blows away from her body while she moves forward, but she takes care to bind herself with red garments later on in the narrative.

In the first few lines of the story, Dody's coed, Bamber, scrambles for her shopping bags because he "banged into her bike in Market Hill, spilling oranges, figs, and a package of pink-frosted cakes" (173). The cakes are notably store-bought, in

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[54] The attention paid to Perrault's nonmetonymic title in *Marvelous Transformations* welcomes closer analysis of Plath's title. "Stone Boy" refers to a statue in the garden of Newnham College, to which Plath's protagonist Dody tends. She visits daily and brushes, sometimes even scrapes snow from the body of the "winged, dolphin carrying boy" (174). She asks: "If not I, who then?" (175). Like the 1697 "Le petit chaperon rouge" all references to this stone boy are not capitalized in the story. He is even more nameless and less specific than the young girl with the cape, who wears at least *the* little red riding hood, while the statue is anyboy carrying anydolphin.

contrast to the homemade cakes and galettes in Perrault and Grimm. This contrast represents one way in which Dody steps away from the littleness of her sisters in red, who shuttle homemade goods through woods at the request of their mothers. By way of apology for throwing Dody from her path, Bamber invites her to a party where "all the literary boys" will be and promises to send their mutual acquaintance, Hamish, along as her escort (174). This quasiliterary salon compares to the deviation the little red riding hood takes from her path in Perrault's tale, "happily picking hazelnuts, running after butterflies, and making bouquets with tiny flowers she found" (MT 175). The little red riding hood's nonlinear pursuit of butterflies is transformative—where she previously "didn't know that it is dangerous to stop and listen to wolves" she arrives to her grandmother's house, "heard the wolf's gruff voice and was at first afraid" (MT 176). There is a level of autodidacticism at play here that carries over to Plath's story, and connects to the auto-generative moments in Pizarnik's poem.

In preparation for the party, Dody dons a litany of binding red accessories. They include a red headband, "wide red belt," and red lipstick, after which she portends, "I will bear pain, she testified to the air, painting her fingernails Applecart Red" (175). The scene recalls a moment during her chat with Bamber where Dody "felt her fingers crisped, empty in the cold. Fallen into disuse, into desuetude," she says, "I freeze" (173). That the narrative lends ample time to this "binding" or "freezing" of Dody in layers of red accessories might play on the equally extended stripping scene in "The Grandmother's Tale," which has been read by Paul Delarue as "the original folktale from

which [the Perrault and Grimm versions] surely derive" (Dundes 13).[55]

In Plath's story the stripping action is reversed—striptease becomes dress-tease. That is to say, while the young girl in "Grandmother's Tale" strips to tease, to distract, and to escape, Dody carefully *dresses* to tease, to call attention, and to offer herself. Her internal dialogue during this reversed striptease supports such a reading: "Unwincing, in her mind's eye, she bared her flesh. Here. Strike home" (Plath 175). Dody seems to look forward, bravely, to the moment when these accessories will signal her body as an offering and then part with her flesh. That Dody dresses slowly in red belts, bands and scarves that bind before Hamish arrives at her dorm reveals how clothing affects the construction of her identities in the story, and in relation to young girls in red everywhere.

A striptease that "disappeared" then persists in this postmodern retelling, and could align Dody's dress-tease with readings of Red Riding Hood as naïve, sexually curious, and victimized.[56] Dody's hopes for her evening do seem to support this comparison, as she begs the "jewel pricks of the stars: let something happen. Something terrible, something bloody" (175). Dody's desire comes through in this statement, but it is notably unspeakable and indefinable—anchored only by "something" terrible and "something" bloody. Dody's conscious offering of self reads as her desire for maturity, which renders the headband, belt and nail polish the older and rebellious red sisters of the

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[55] As Catherine Orenstein notes, Delarue collected this story and in 1951 published a study called "The Grandmother's Tale" (68). Although both Orenstein and Dundes point to this folktale as the clear origin of "Red Riding Hood," there is no way to confirm their claims—the story's transmission was oral and ever-shifting, and Charles Perrault is not currently available for an interview.

[56] See Alan Dundes' *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* and the chapter by Bruno Bettelheim, entitled "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalyitcally."

little red riding hood. Again, she dons red accessories not to distract but to offer identity and body to the world. Dody wills the sky to work on both as it sees fit (175).

That these red accessories are multiple and varied reflects Dody's own ever-changing desire.[57] Perrault's voracious hood engages its wearer in a similar dress-tease where the hood imposes itself on the young girl's body and her name. The hood, however, is singular and as such represents singular desire. Dody, on the other hand, experiences a multiplicity of appetites and identities throughout the story—many of these fairy tale based, as Jessica McCort discusses and will be elaborated on later. Dody's form of multiple longing is precisely what Turner and Greenhill seek to unearth in their queer readings of the Grimms, "where the lens shifts focus from normative sexual dynamics…to the tale's internal struggles, suggestive of multiple and more complex desires" (4). Dody's accessories do not consume her identity as the red hood nearly does in Perrault, but act as vessels that channel her desire outwards in various directions—towards what is bloody and what is terrible.

Following her reversed striptease, the first wolf of the story enters the narrative, and his entrance marks the moment in the text where clothing begins to unravel. Dody carries a red coat as she descends the stairs to meet her escort and slips her arms into the piece as Hamish holds it flared (176). He also carries her academic gown in a "black, funereal bundle" (176). Hamish's interactions with Dody's clothing and his attention to

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[57] The French etymology of "chaperon" is worth noting, here: "often (especially of a woman) … originally a hood covering…as protection, an escort to a (young) woman" (*Origins*, 91). The feminine roots of the word have interesting implications for the young male Hamish, who chaperones Dody to the party. In his chapter "'Little Red Riding Hood' as Male Creation" from *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, Jack Zipes contests views of the red cap as symbolic of the sun or as puberty by explaining, "Perrault used the word *chaperon*, which was a small stylish cap worn by women of the aristocracy and middle classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (123).

their varying states of disrepair work to feminize him; and that Hamish chaperones Dody to the party and has their journey "all arranged," does the same (178). By dressing Dody he mirrors the grandmother as the giver of Red Riding Hood's cape, and by chiding and guiding her recalls the mother in the Grimms' version of the tale. In "Rotkäppchen" mother warns daughter not to stray from the path as Hamish warns Dody to "keep away" from literary boys at the party (Plath 177).[58] Plath even calls Hamish's behavior towards Dody "guardian angelling," perhaps in reference to the feminine and "obedient angels in pink gauze" that decorate the walls of the house (182, 179). Dody's internal answer to Hamish's nagging is "worth keeping from is worth going to" (177). Her dalliance in the woods is a very conscious, lucid choice. She rebels not only against Hamish's cautionary words and a small, direct expression of desire, but against gendered gestures throughout the party scene as well.

On their pre-arranged path to the party Hamish dresses Dody in another layer, that of her black Cambridge gown: "[he] helped her to slip her arms into the two holes of the black gown," and scolds her for a tear in the material, warning that any proctors they see would rip it to shreds if they noticed (179).[59] Dody's contradictory response to Hamish is "'I'd sew it up,'…" and internally, "Men. Mend the torn, the tattered. Salvage the raveled sleeve" (179). Dody's language alludes to her role as both salvager and predator

[58] In her chapter "Red Riding Hood Redux: The Cross-Dressing Wolf" Catherine Orenstein draws on Anne Sexton's poem "Red Riding Hood," which reads the Grimms' hunter as a doctor performing a caesarean section, and the subversive cross-dressing behavior of the wolf before she concludes: "Thus, the wolf, our arch symbol of masculinity and even misogyny is also a transvestite, a mother-to-be, and even sometimes a grandmother" (195). Hamish's character then seems like a nod to the wolf's shifting identities.

[59] This destruction of clothing echoes the crispy stockings from "The Grandmother's Tale." Clothing persists as a creative and destructive agent.

early on in the text. She exhibits self-destructive purposes in being drawn to "what's worth keeping from," and (re)creative tendencies in her desire to patch the gown. Dody's internal dialogue is also full of the phrase, "mark that," which may display her understanding that marks and scars left by clothing and gesture matter—that they can and do linger on the body in significant ways.[60] "Mark that," also expresses her vigilant nature, and supports the reading of Dody's rebellion as a very conscious one indeed.

Hamish the wardrobe stylist, ever attentive to Dody's clothing, seems to have dressed Dody up only to strip her down when they arrive at the party: "Hamish did away with Dody's coat and gown…Mark that" (180). Despite his mothering tendencies, Hamish can also read wolf-like—and he is not the only character who troubles gender roles of Red Riding Hood tales in the narrative. A female hunter floats around the periphery of the party, and Dody fleetingly notes the "sweater and skirt of hunter's green close-cloven as frog skin" worn by this dancing girl. Her cursory observation could function doubly: as a portent of her own salvation, and/or to signal her awareness of a protective presence, the girl in hunter green, that deters half-grown man wolves from satisfying their appetites. It is Dody's appetite, however, that comes across most strongly in the story and might be most dangerous to her in the end.

Again, this chapter's reading of appetite in "Red Riding Hood" tales hinges on an interrelation among food, sex and dress. Plath picks up on this interrelation through detailed descriptions of clothing and its effects on gender and gesture, and also when she describes traffic at the bar in terms of couples' appetites: "couples are hungry going up; stuffed coming down" (178). Plath's rhetoric of appetite as corporal and

[60] See the introduction to Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (xii-xiii).

intersubjectively desirous situates itself within the real where food, sex and dress interrelate. Appetite manifests itself strongly through the wolf and the red garment in both Perrault and the Grimms, while in Plath it is Dody's appetite that best displays the interrelation among material desires—and it does so in a way that troubles gender. Dody is both the most wolf-like and multidesirous subject in the world of the narrative.

Dody exhibits wolf-like behavior, for example, when she hunts the poet, Leonard, whose shadowy moss-green chin matches the green of his twill shirt, which pokes through the holes of his black sweater (184, 180). It is "worn and torn," like Dody's black gown. Dody's attitude towards Leonard is both predatory and crafty—"knitting up the sleeve of circumstance. She moved," she pounced (183). Her pick-up line is one of Leonard's own from a poem he wrote: "patch the havoc," she says (183). He responds, miming her, "not all their ceremony can patch the havoc" (182). Dody lures Leonard with his own language, just as the wolf lures grandmother with "Red Riding Hood's" language and lures the young girl with her grandmother's. Like the wolf, Dody is successful—but only to a point.

Plath alludes to the interrelation of food, sex and dress when Leonard strips off Dody's red hairband, puts it in his pocket and then "rakes" Dody's mouth with "green shadow, moss shadow" (183). Leonard undresses Dody in a manner simultaneously more sinister and innocent than Hamish, and then tries to quickly flee the scene of their tryst—a small room where "people's coats slumped in piles on the tables, cast-off sheaths and shells…ghosts gone gallivanting" (183). Bodies at the party seem incomplete without their protective shells. Dody, headband-less and likely free from her other binding red accessories, makes one last attempt to satisfy her appetite:

> sighting the whiteness of his cheek with its verdigris stain, moving by her mouth. Teeth gouged. And held. Salt, warm salt, laving the tastebuds of her tongue. Teeth dug to meet…mark that, mark that. (184)[61]

Dody, arguably unserved and unsatisfied by her red accessories as markers of desire, steps far outside passive descriptors of the Grimm girls when she tries the wolf on for size and bites into Leonard's cheek. For a fleeting moment, Leonard becomes her eroticized meal and the gesture problematizes both gender and sexuality. When teeth leave flesh, however, Leonard quickly punishes Dody for her ever-shifting and mal-shifting sartorial desires. He throws her backwards, leaves disgusted, and informs the party of Dody's behavior. Dody leaves the house fearing, "Mothers would stop in Market Hill, pointing to their children: 'There's the girl who bit the boy. He died the day after'" (186). Reading this moment of mastication as an affirmation of "Red Riding Hood's" unbreakable tie to her stereotypes is tempting, but considering the text as a whole reveals its wide range of implications. Some critical texts that attend to Plath's story overlook these implications, however, in their reading of Dody trying the wolf on for size.

Jessica McCort's article, "Alice in Cambridge: Little Girls Lost and 'Stone Boy with Dolphin,'" for example, claims that Plath punishes Dody for stepping outside feminine fairy-tale etiquette. McCort explains how Dody tries on slippers of other leading ladies in fairy tales, but overlooks one key furry garment as she does so:

> In "Stone Boy," Plath carefully and painstakingly collages popular fairy tale and fantasy imagery into an arrangement that places women's sexuality and the imaginative process of female fantasy, and more importantly, how such fantasies are formed, under scrutiny. (184)

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[61] McCort reads Dody's behavior as Eve-like, and notes how "Leonard's flesh is subtly linked to the 'cheeks' of the poisonous apple eaten by Snow White and the Wicked Queen in the Grimm tale, although Snow White eats the poisoned 'red cheek,' while the Wicked Queen bites from the white (the word cheek is used in the Grimm tale to describe the two sides of the apple)" (183).

McCort's attention to the "formation" of fantasies speaks directly to Turner and Greenhill, who write, "in a sense, the entire…project hinges on agreeing with the critical importance of understanding desire(s) *as*, and *in* formation" (11). That is to say, when reading tales transgressively the object of desire in is not necessarily singular but multiple, and always already in the process of formation—much like the (re)creative process of patching a garment. Dody attempts to access and express her unspecified and arguably multiple desire for "something terrible" and "something bloody" in the text by "trying on" like party dresses not only the role of Red Riding Hood, but also those of Rapunzel, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, and finally, the wolf himself.[62]

McCort, however, overlooks Dody's constant state of becoming and reads the aftermath of Dody's meal as her "punishment," part of which is the loss of her red mouth. After her bite of cheek, Dody leans in to the mirror and sees:

> …there was no mouth on the face: the mouth place was the same sallow color as the rest of the skin, defining its shape as a badly botched piece of sculpture defines its shape, by shadows under the raised and swollen parts. (185)

In absenting Dody's mouth from her face, Plath suggests it is as easily removable as any other red accessory. McCort reads this moment as Dody's nod to Eve and her apple, and insists on removal of mouth, voice and appetite as punishment for the "totally naïve Little Red Riding Hood" (182). By nature of its removability, the mouth joins the ranks of crimson accouterments that express Dody's multiplicity of desire, and this comparison is in part what makes any conclusive reading of the story, where Dody is punished for her sexual curiosity, impossible.

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[62] Kimberly Lau describes Sleeping Beauty in *Transgressive Tales* as "the quintessential Grimms girl…deep in slumber…nothing but a pretty face, a supple body there for the gazing, there for the taking" (122).

What additionally deters McCort's conclusive reading is that the moment mouth becomes accessory a comparison is drawn between body and clothing. This comparison brings into question the "red cloak of doom's" substance and the "hunter green skirt's" fabric content—that is to say their text(iles)—which have a form and a history. The etymology of textile literally refers to "thing woven," and that Dody begins to rely on textiles after she loses her mouth seems to parallel Ovid's paradigmatic tale of the text/textile interrelation as it revolves around Tereus, Procne and Philomela. After Tereus rapes Philomela, the sister of his wife Procne, he cuts Philomela's tongue from her mouth to prevent her from telling her story. Locked inside a cabin of stone,

> her speechless lips could tell / No tale of what was done. But there's a fund / Of talent in distress, and misery / Learns cunning. On a clumsy native loom / She wove a clever fabric, working words / In red on a white ground to tell the tale / Of wickedness. (Ovid 130)

The implications of Dody's lip loss arguably parallel Philomela's loss of her tongue. Although they are stripped of voices these women find resources for speech elsewhere, and Ovid even emphasizes Philomela's cunning—and *red* thread— in the face of the resources' inadequacy. The same might be said for Dody, who at first relies on the texts of fairy tales to access her identity but goes on to weave a textile of self that is constantly in formation.

Reading textiles—red textiles—as texts and also bodies as texts clarifies just how Plath employs fairy tale, and also sheds light on the choice to outfit her protagonist in the gender-bending role of the wolf: the original cross-dresser. Through Dody's language and her consistent approach to mending the torn and the tattered, Plath signals to readers a strategy for reading the text carefully and constructively—almost as if she encourages

them to take the path of needles rather than the path of pins in "Grandmother's Tale."[63] Dody tells Hamish, for example, that she will "salvage the raveled sleeve" of her gown "with black embroidery thread. So it wouldn't show," a creative process far more thoughtful than Hamish's warning about her garment being torn to shreds (179). Additionally, the most tattered textiles in the story belong to Leonard and Dody, whose passionate encounter leaves an ambiguous, conceptual hole in Plath's text. As such, it opens itself to reworking and reweaving.

McCort reads Leonard's response to Dody as her "punishment," Dody as "passive sexual victim," and the story in general as a mode of scrutiny of female roles in fairy tales. Specifically, McCort critiques how female fantasy, or desire, is shaped by the fairy tale:

> Plath underscores the misguidedness…of the fact that [Dody] is turned on by a man who seems both brutal and sadistic, demonstrating that this desire has been learned at least partially in the imaginative worlds that the girl inhabits when reading. (McCort 180)

There are moments when Dody does read like a true Grimms girl—inert, passive, and "mostly dead" during an unexciting scene where she has sex with Hamish, for example (Plath 180). McCort calls such behavior a "masochistic reliance on fiction" (180). There are also moments in the story, however, that laud the transformative power of woven and spoken word. Again, McCort fails to recognize that these fairy-tale fictions are not already "formed" as she says, but weaving themselves within and throughout Dody's nebulous and shifting fantasies, "*in* formation" (McCort 184; Turner and Greenhill 11).

Indeed, that Dody shifts among many fairy-tale based signifiers, has no fixed

[63] Recall that each path the werewolf offers the girl is littered with tools used for sewing: pins and needles. Pins bind in an incomplete, temporary and makeshift sense, while needles bring material together in more careful and meticulous manners.

essence, and tries on a role that so problematizes gender renders Plath's assertion that the party crowd would "keep the story on the tongues, changing, switching its colors, like a chameleon over smeared and lurid territory" (186) an optimistic one. Plath provides an example of such chameleon-like shifts when Leonard's poetic, "not all their ceremony can patch the havoc," becomes shortened in Dody's mouth to the imperative "patch the havoc" (183). It is as if Dody portends how her behavior will become gossip fodder and speaks aloud a command and a strategy for tellers of her tale, as if she believes one teller might successfully patch its havoc. The Grimms' tales can be so woman-centered—especially in the case of "Red Riding Hood," where matriarchal lineage becomes strengthened through the bond of shared clothing—that it is likely the teller who patches the havoc of Dody's story will sympathize with female community.[64] Dody herself finds female community in storytellers who both wreak havoc and patch havoc through gestures that are constantly in formation.

In the story, Dody discovers familial relationships not in her female dorm nor her mothering keeper Mrs. Guinea but in the text(iles) of her literary predecessors:

> In her third-floor attic room she listened, catching the pitch of the last shrieks: listened: to witches on the rack, to Joan of Arc crackling at the stake, to anonymous ladies flaring like torches in the rending metal of Riviera roadsters, to Zelda enlightened, burning behind the bars of her madness (175).

The literary ladies cook as the peasant girl's clothes burn in the fire of "Grandmother's Tale." At the end of the story Dody strips herself down alone in her dorm room, and, drinking her simple glass of milk she observes how it will mark her, just as her

[64] Recall that Turner and Greenhill read the Grimms tales as matriarchal centered stories where "female figures—Red, her mother and her grandmother are pivotal. Further, versions of some Grimm stories are virtually patriarch(y) free. Collected almost entirely from women, to a large extent their women-centeredness survived the Grimms' various redactions and expurgations" (9).

encounters with Leonard and Hamish have done, "stained, deep-grained with all the words and acts of all the Dodys from birth cry on" (194). Gestures stain, but speech has staining potential as well, because Dody describes "the room brimming with her act, with versions and variations on the theme of her act which would mark her by tomorrow like the browned scar on her cheek," and as such the stains of actions persist but become mutable by nature of their orality (186). Similarly, gestures of stripping, cooking, and burning present Red Riding Hood and her twentieth century iterations with opportunities for both wreaking and patching havoc—and as such these gestures mark moments of becoming. Dody nods to Zelda and Joan of Arc as her literary predecessors, and it is about time Plath nod to the peasant girl in "Grandmother's Tale" who is resourceful and brave, saves herself, and escapes the text free from any trappings of clothing.

The Moral: Verbal Formation in Perrault

Moments of orality in Plath's story present Dody and her tale-tellers with opportunities to "patch the havoc," an act which is as constantly *in*-formation as Red Riding Hood's shifting identities. It is worthwhile to revisit Perrault from such a standpoint, with considerations of significant spoken moments in mind. The cheekiness of Red Riding Hood's ministrip upon an invitation to bed has been discussed earlier, and as such the overt strip persists in "Le petit chaperon rouge." Perrault's teasing element, however, emerges more subtly. Like so much in the tale, the tease revolves around appetite.

If the hungry wolf gobbled the little red riding hood up the moment they met, Perrault would have no narrative. It is not out of the question to assume the wolf might

behave thusly, as Perrault takes care to note how he has not eaten for three entire days; and so begins Perrault's tease at the very moment the wolf decides to prolong his meal. The wolf sets the stakes for himself in this tease, and seems to get so caught up in his game that he teases the little red riding hood and arguably encourages her to tease him by the end of the tale as well. The wolf notably navigates and tests himself throughout this game *verbally*. Instead of crashing through the door the moment he arrives to the grandmother's house, the wolf must first prove his parroting abilities by successfully counterfeiting the little red riding hood's voice. He does so, and even gains a tool that will help him along in the next level of the tease: a grandmotherial sound byte.

Perrault's tease nears its climax when the little red riding hood arrives at her grandmother's home. That the wolf does not "immediately fall upon her" as he did with her grandmother is telling; it speaks again to his desire to prove something to himself, whether it be physical prowess or some level of superior self-control (MT 176). This is especially emphasized during the pillow talk scene between the little red riding hood and the wolf, where she verbally strips him down body part by body part. Each body part she mentions is met by an affirmation from the wolf that its "great" size is meant for figuratively consuming the girl: arms to hug, eyes to see, ears to hear her and finally, teeth to eat. The only body part that is not quite meant for eating the little red riding hood are the wolf's legs, which are large simply to "run better my dear," a moment that speaks to the wolf's competitive streak. Very little variation occurs between the little red riding hood's sentences, "Grandmother, you have such big…!" which themselves function in a teasing manner, as if the girl and the wolf tease each other during their pillow talk through verbal jousts. One gets the sense that if she continued to name all body parts but

teeth, this tease would continue.

Furthermore, it is not out of the question to assume the wolf might be encouraging the little red riding hood by highlighting these body parts to her as he strips, leaving so little of his body uncovered that her focus must shift to his face and then his teeth. Finally, Perrault is not ignoring sexuality in his tale but playing with it through a properly narrative channel: language. That such moments occur verbally render them a process of becoming, and prime them for use as future tools of tellers who will indeed aggravate and then patch the havoc.

CHAPTER 3

BEARDED MEN AND THEIR TOOLS

How (Not) to Punish Curious Women

Alejandra Pizarnik's prose poem *The Bloody Countess* (1966) and Sylvia Plath's short poem "Bluebeard" (circa 1950) each draw on the antecedent tradition of Perrault's fairy tale, "La barbe bleue" (Bluebeard) (1697). The traditional reading "La barbe bleue" is misogynistic in nature. Such a reading focuses on punishing the transgression of Bluebeard's eighth wife, whose insatiable curiosity leads her to enter a room that Bluebeard expressly forbade her to see. She discovers a morgue of his past wives, whose bodies adorn the wall and whose slit throats pool blood onto the floor. Perrault implies that these women suffered the same deadly affliction of curiosity as Bluebeard's current wife and were duly punished. For psychoanalytic scholars like Bruno Bettelheim, the gravity of the eighth wife's sin turns on the tiny key that becomes stained in blood. Bettelheim interprets the stain as a symbol of sexual infidelity, which Bluebeard repeatedly punishes with murder. In the tale, due to Perrault's repeated, explicit use of the word "curiosity," female curiosity and sexual infidelity become harmfully conflated. Perrault seems to create a world in which each feminine "sin" should be punished with death. The Grimms' version of the tale, "Blaubart" (1812), differs from Perrault's on

some minor details, but generally contributes to a similarly misogynistic message. Because this tale is a hallmark of misogyny, many feminist rewrites of the story exist, and this study invokes these rewrites to situate Plath and Pizarnik's pieces within the feminist tradition. Beginning with the antecedents, Perrault and the Grimms, as this chapter moves through each poem it will reach out to feminist rewrites of "La barbe bleue," specifically Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979) and Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Bluebeard's Daughter" (1940).

Along with "Le petit chaperon rouge," "La barbe bleue" or "Bluebeard" is also included in Charles Perrault's 1697 collection of tales entitled "Histoires ou contes du temps passé" (Stories or Tales of Times Past.) In "La barbe bleue," Perrault tells the tale of a young girl who betrays her husband's wishes and enters a forbidden room. A red bloodstain on a tiny key gives her away—a stain that refuses to disappear. She is also the would-be murder victim of her husband, who condemns her to death by sword. These objects, bloodstain and key, comment on the function of female curiosity and its role in the text. Maria Tatar remarks repeatedly on the correlations between Bluebeard's wife and curious mythological characters like Eve and Pandora, and many scholars highlight the Bluebeard tale as a paradigmatic text of male punishment of female inquisitiveness. As they make reference to this tale in *La condesa sangrienta* (*The Bloody Countess*) and the short poem "Bluebeard," Alejandra Pizarnik and Sylvia Plath inevitably comment on female curiosity as well, while at the same time highlighting a less prominent player in Bluebeard criticism: the murder weapon, and in turn its wielder, Bluebeard himself.[65]

[65] Shifts in Bluebeard's weapon of a choice can indicate a shift the cultural context of the tale. Sylvia Townsend Warner's story, "Bluebeard's Daughter," which will be discussed later in the chapter, "belongs to a tradition in English of Orientalized 'Bluebeard'

The bloodstain and key represent female curiosity while the murder tool aims to punish it, and, consequently, a comparative reading of the murder instruments in Plath and Pizarnik should inevitably comment on female curiosity as well, but this is not entirely the case. Feminist fairy-tale scholars have denounced overuse of this theme in critical approaches to "La barbe bleue," where the key and bloodstain often play integral roles. Again, Bruno Bettelheim believes crossing into the forbidden chamber symbolizes sexual relations and marital infidelity, and his reading hinges on the bloody key (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 161). While it may appear that to focus on the murder tool in twentieth-century retellings of "La barbe bleue" would equally, and perhaps harmfully, privilege the theme of female curiosity and how it is punished in the story, Alejandra Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* and Sylvia Plath's "Bluebeard" show that this is not the case—in fact, they shift focus elsewhere, onto Bluebeard himself and the nature of his own murderous impulses. A similar result emerges from a comparative reading of Perrault's "La barbe bleue," and the brothers Grimms' German version entitled "Blaubart," where the murder instruments differ, albeit slightly, and reveal different insights about the nature of their wielder. This comparative reading of the classic tales shows that it is worthwhile to analyze the murder weapon as a revelatory symbol of Bluebeard's identity, a premise that this study carries forward into its treatment of Pizarnik's and Plath's twentieth century versions of the tale.

As is the case with "Red Riding Hood," both Perrault and the Brothers' Grimm

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tales…The trend may have begun in 1763 when a translator of Charles Perrault who signed his work G.M. (probably Guy Miège) changed the type of knife Bluebeard wields from a 'cutlass' (Robert Samber's 1729 translation) to a 'scimitar.'" (MT 367). I do not argue that a comparative reading of murder tools in Plath and Pizarnik reveals cultural shifts but more thematic and symbolic shifts.

are credited with renditions of Bluebeard narratives. The Grimms introduced a German version of the tale entitled "Blaubart" in their first 1812 publication of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, but omitted it in later editions due to its indisputably French origins (Zipes, *Tradition* 736). The Grimms' tale "Fitcher's Bird," also follows a narrative trajectory similar to that of "La barbe bleue," which will be discussed later in the chapter. In addition to their choice of murder tool, other narrative and structural elements from these French and German tales differ considerably. For example, in "Blaubart" it is not Sister Anne who gestures that her brothers hurry to the castle to save their sister's life but the young bride herself. Furthermore, she does not merely motion to her brothers but shouts loudly. In further contrast to Perrault the Grimms privilege the role of the bride's brothers by introducing them at the onset of the tale, while Perrault makes no mention of the men until the last scene. The Grimms' young bride then reads a hair more independent than Perrault's and also less isolated—traits that contribute to Bluebeard's chosen murder method in each tale. As Maria Tatar describes in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, these differences might further be attributed to "how the Grimms, ever responsive to the values of their time and increasingly sensitive to pedagogical demands, transformed adult folk materials into a hybrid form of folklore and literature for children" (xxxiii). "Depend on your male family members," the Grimms seem to say from the start, "and you will avoid the deflowering, penetrating thrust of the phallic sword."

The undertone of the Grimms' murder gesture is certainly more sexual than Perrault's. In each version the brothers arrive and successfully save their sister from death at the hand of Bluebeard—in fact, they interrupt him midmurder gesture. Perrault

makes it clear that Bluebeard would have decapitated his wife if not for the arrival of her brothers: “Then he grabbed her by the hair with one hand and raised the blade with the other, ready to slash her throat” (MT 168). The Grimms, on the other hand, envision their bloodthirsty nobleman in the throes of a thrusting gesture, with the intention of piercing his young bride’s heart. The murder tools mentioned differ slightly in name, blade and sword, but the trajectory of their motion differs considerably. The motion depends on the desire of the wielder and the specific nuances of the feminine curiosity that he intends to punish. Perrault’s Bluebeard aims to decapitate while the Grimms, to penetrate. Recall that the Grimms’ bride is slightly more independent than Perrault’s, and that this penetrative gesture could reflect the German Bluebeard’s desire to display more dominance, sexually or otherwise, over his self-sufficient, curious bride. Although it is difficult to speculate on how these gestures precisely reflect the personal desire of each Bluebeard, because they are different they suggest that the murder tool does not exist without a guiding force and a specific, castigating aim. The weapon becomes a tool of self-expression as well as a murder tool, and it is helpful to approach Pizarnik and Plath’s texts with this in mind.

As has been seen with Red Riding Hood narratives in Chapter 2, in fairy-tale scholarship it is difficult to argue that one classic urtext serves as the source of a tale. The Grimms’ fleeting nod to Bluebeard, however, illustrates how Perrault’s “La barbe bleue,” is an exception to this rule and serves as the original print source for Bluebeard figures. Perrault’s urtext, “La barbe bleue,” recounts the story of a wealthy man whose beard, “by some terrible misfortune,” was blue, and “gave him such a horrid, nasty appearance that women and girls fled at the sight of him” (MT 164). When he

approaches a neighboring noblewoman in search of one of her beautiful daughter's hands in marriage, each daughter refuses. After a weekend at Bluebeard's lavish country estates with her family and friends, however, the younger sister decides to overlook his blue beard and marry who she now believes to be a "very courtly gentleman" (MT 164).

A month into their marriage, Bluebeard sets off for "important business in the countryside," and gives his young bride all the keys to the house, including the "little key to the office at the end of the great hall of the downstairs apartment" (MT 165). He warns her to use every key but the smallest one, for if she does his anger will "know no bounds" (MT 165). Previously afraid of her husband's presence, the girl's neighbors and friends all visit her while he is away. The party explores the entire house, jealous of the splendor and the girl's happiness. The girl, however, wants nothing more than to open the office in the downstairs apartment. She hurries "down a private staircase, moving so fast that two or three times she thought she would break her neck" (MT 166). The girl enters the dark office, and when her eyes adjust she sees:

> …that the floor was covered with congealed blood wherein the corpses of several women that had been hung along the walls could forever see their reflection—the very women Blue Beard had married and successively slit at the throat. (MT 166)

The girl drops the key into the pool of blood and it becomes stained in such a resilient and miraculous a way that "when you got rid of it on one side, it appeared on the other" (MT 167). Bluebeard returns from his trip that very night, asks for the key the next day, and soon discovers what has happened in his absence. As punishment, this eighth wife is condemned to death, and when she begs for time to pray Bluebeard gives her "half of fifteen minutes, and not one minute more" (MT 167).

Once left alone, the young bride calls to her sister and begs her to watch for their

brothers who promised to visit that day. Sister Anne, who has apparently been nearby all along, sees a few things from the tower, like "sun raining dust and grass getting lush," and "a thick spray of dust" that turns out to be a herd of sheep before she sees "two cavalry soldiers arriving from the side," who are indeed the girls' brothers (MT 167). Bluebeard's screams begin to shake the house, and when his wife comes downstairs he grabs her hair, raises his wide blade as if to decapitate her, and denies her request for "a brief moment to collect herself" (MT 168). Just then, the brothers rush inside, draw their swords and drive them through Bluebeard's body leaving him for dead (MT 168). With her inheritance Bluebeard's widow funds the marriage of her sister, buys titles for her two brothers, and finally uses what is left for her own second marriage, which "helped her forget the miserable time she had with Blue Beard" (MT 168).

Death is meant to be the eighth wife's punishment for giving in, like Eve, Psyche and Pandora, to her curious impulse, which has been read as a sexually curious impulse (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 159). Again, feminist scholars lament the practice of highlighting female curiosity as a pernicious critical approach to the tale:

> …nearly every recent critic of 'bluebeard' stories has remarked on the tendency of this group of tales, especially literary versions, to focus on the crimes of the wife rather than the husband—or, as Bacchilega puts it, their 'explicit condemnation of the heroine's curiosity, but total silence on the ethics of the husband's serial murders.' (Turner and Greenhill 209)

As Bacchilega calls attention to the ethical issues at stake in the story, she also touches on the theme of silence in the tale and its surrounding critical commentary. Turner and Greenhill align both silence and curiosity with the fairy-tale feminine in their comparison of "La barbe bleue" to the Grimms' "Marienkind," which also involves punishment of a feminine virtue: "While Bluebeard's method of punishment is far more permanent than

the Virgin Mary's, the logic is identical: both castigate the lack of one feminine virtue (obedience) by enforcing another (silence)" (209). When the authors mention a lack of obedience, it is helpful to remember that the young bride's insatiable curiosity leads her to disobey. To punish curiosity with enforced silence suggests curiosity is somehow a loud and imposing expression of self. In "La barbe bleue," this expression renders cacophonous any balance between male domination and female submission, and must be silenced with a tool and a gesture fit for the purpose. As the murder tool punishes female curiosity, it aims to silence loud expressions of selfhood. In addition to illustrating transgressive feminine virtures, curiosity and self-expression, Bluebeard's weapon choice also reveals contextual and cultural changes in the story.

For example, when Bluebeard becomes a Turk in the Orientalizing tradition of the tale, his weapon shifts from a wide blade to an appropriately Orientalized scimitar. As Maria Tatar notes, "The exotic beard inspired a number of interpretations that cast Bluebeard in the role of oriental tyrant. Edmund Dulac's illustrations set the tale in the orient," and later, in a caption of one of Dulac's illustrations, "Wielding a scimitar, Bluebeard orders his wife downstairs for her execution" (Tatar, *Annotated* 145, 149). As previously mentioned, this shift in murder tool signals a similar shift in Bluebeard's identity and psychic background. In fact, the murder tool speaks so loudly of its wielder that this critical observation regarding the shift from blade to scimitar warrants discussion of the weapons strewn all over the Bluebeard tradition. To consider only Perrault's blade as the comparative touchstone for Plath and Pizarnik's pieces would be short-sighted in light of all the feminist reworkings of "La barbe bleue" that serve to contextualize Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* and Plath's "Bluebeard."

In this chapter, Perrault's sword finds comparisons in the many, elaborate murder instruments and torture devices that populate Pizarnik's piece, one of which is a replica of the German automaton called the Iron Virgin. As stated above, the weapons scattered throughout the Bluebeard tales illustrate how Perrault's wide blade is just one in a list of many, and give reason to search for critical comparisons elsewhere in the feminist rewrites. For example, the "Iron Virgin" vignette in *The Bloody Countess* resonates intertextually with Mary de Morgan's 1877 fairy tale entitled "A Toy Princess," and just as richly with Rapunzel and Sleeping Beauty narratives. "The Iron Virgin" also calls out to Angela Carter's postmodern rewriting of Perrault, a short story entitled "The Bloody Chamber." Pizarnik's Iron Virgin blurs the line between human and machine just as the toy princess does in de Morgan; and Carter's reference to an "Iron Maiden" in "The Bloody Chamber" provides a solid point of departure for comparing the strikingly similar torture chambers seen in both Pizarnik's and Carter's texts. Later, an analysis of Sylvia Plath's short poem "Bluebeard" reveals a metaphorical, artistic, and more technologically advanced conception of the weapon as Bluebeard's x-ray-like gaze. The poem also comments on female endurance, which is a form of agency in that it represents sheer intrepidness. The agency does not reach its fulfillment quickly— before she may act Plath's and Warner's protagonists must wait, bear, and indeed, endure Bluebeard. This sense of female endurance in Plath resonates with Sylvia Townsend Warner's 1940 feminist rewrite entitled "Bluebeard's Daughter."

The Bloody Chambers

Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* is a prose poem written in eleven parts, which will be referred to throughout this section by their titles and as "vignettes." Of the eleven vignettes in the piece, this study considers the first four entitled "The Iron Virgin," "Death by Water," "The Mortal Cage," and "Classic Torture," all of which provide content related to torture devices and murder weapons. This study also addresses vignettes seven and nine, entitled "Mirror of Melancholy," and "Blood Baths," respectively. The coverage of Pizarnik's vignettes is selective because it attempts to include only those that pertain closely to the ideas at stake in this section, which include serial murder, the hybridity of Countess Bathory's character, and her appetite—that is to say, her curiosity and desire. The Countess becomes hybrid in the sense that she encompasses both Bluebeard in his murderous impulses and his seven dead wives in their curiosity. In fact, it only seems appropriate that Countess Bathory's character crosses archetypal boundaries because Pizarnik's piece does the same thing with genre. *The Bloody Countess* has been considered a prose poem, a novella, an essay, and a piece of scholarly criticism since its first publication in 1966. The text bends genre, and as such encourages similarly hybrid and elastic approaches to its content, specifically by calling on fairy tale and despite basing itself partially in historical truths.

Countess Bathory, for whom *The Bloody Countess* is named, was a Hungarian noblewoman who tortured and killed over six hundred young women before being sequestered in her castle in 1610.[66] Recall that seven dead wives hang from the walls in

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[66] In the chapter "Vampire, Witch, Serial Killer, or All of the Above? The Bloody Countess Elizabeth Bathory" from *Monstrous Deviations,* Cristina Santos discusses how,

Perrault's chamber, and the young girl in "La barbe bleue" is the eighth. Though the Countess' numbers far exceed Bluebeard's, both characters are serial murders without motive—a comparative reading which becomes apparent once "La barbe bleue" is read backwards through the lens of Pizarnik's *Countess.* In other words, by foregrounding the Countess' impulse to serially murder, Pizarnik's text arguably distances "La barbe bleue" from gender-based critical readings where the wife and her genetically insatiable curiosity motivate the tale and the attempted murder. Pizarnik's piece does this primarily by devoting lengthy textual space to the Countess' vast collection of murder tools, and only arriving at Bathory's "motive," as if it is an afterthought, towards the end of her prose. Until that convenient motive appears, the Countess' behavior seems based in nothing more than her insatiable desire to kill. While the motive Pizarnik offers is fascinating, that the Countess murders to access the regenerative properties of young virginal blood, it is not central to the conception of Countess Bathory's persona as a serial killer. To sum up, in her murderous desires Bathory takes on the attributes of the male character Bluebeard, and her refusal to provide a motive refocuses on the real crime in "La barbe bleue": the slaying of innocent women. Bathory's female masculinity, that she takes on as a sort of Bluebeard-ean drag king, becomes most apparent in the dominant sexual relations she enjoys with her young female murder victims and seems to contest

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"to modern man, Erzsébet has become a lesbian vampire icon, a token Goddess of their own perverse desires" (177). Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess*, where Bathory sexually assaults her young female victims, is one example of the ambiguous presentation of sexuality present in Pizarnik's poems. Pizarnik's own sexuality has been the topic of much discussion, and in *Árbol de Alejandra: Pizarnik reassessed*, Fiona Mackintosh mentions that Cristina Piña, Plath's biographer, "alluded to Pizarnik's lesbian relationships, but resisted reading her work in light of these" (8).

the distinction of genders in the world of the text.

Again, *The Bloody Countess* is directly based on the life of Countess Bathory, a seventeenth century Hungarian noblewoman whose trial records were unearthed from the Archives of Budapest in 1729. The French Surrealist author and artist Valentine Penrose became fascinated with Bathory and penned a novel based on these trial records, *La Comtesse sanglante*, which was published in 1963. In the introduction to her novel Penrose speculates that Bathory's trial documents,

> because of the horrific nature of [their] contents, had lain under lock and key for more than a century…it was the record of the trial of Countess Erzebet Bathory, who believed her beauty would be everlastingly preserved if she bathed in the blood of young and beautiful virgins. (Penrose vi)

Penrose outlines in her introduction what Pizarnik saves for the latter half of her piece: that Countess Bathory was driven to murder by her own vanity and her belief in the regenerative properties of young, virginal blood.

During Pizarnik's time in Paris from1960-1964, she came across *La Comtesse sanglante* and felt inspired to begin work on her own poetic approach to Bathory's sordid tale.[67] Pizarnik's efforts resulted in a series of eleven short poetic vignettes, which she also entitled *La condesa sangrienta*, or *The Bloody Countess*. Pizarnik's piece does not directly refer to Perrault's "La barbe bleue," but these serial killers have much in common.[68] Yet, while Bathory resembles Bluebeard she also resembles Bluebeard's

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[67] Patricia Venti sums up Pizarnik's encounter with the book in her 2008 publication *La dama de estas ruinas* (*The Lady of These Ruins):* "Al publicarse, Alejandra Pizarnik se encontraba en París y al leerla quedó cautivada por el personaje," (Upon its publication, Alejandra Pizarnik found the book in Paris and became captivated by its main character)(13).

[68] For example, in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folk Tales and Fairy Tales* one scholar compares Bluebeard to a historical serial killer and gives an overview of the tale's history: "The most commonly cited source is the historic figure of Gilles de Rais (1404-

dead wives and as such represents an interesting hybridity of gendered characters in the tale. As we will see, her female masculinity emerges through the dominant role she enjoys in her "lesbian," sexual relationships with the young female murder victims housed in her castle. In *Alejandra Pizarnik: evolución de un lenguaje poetico* Susana Haydu also compares Bathory to Bluebeard along with several other notoriously violent literary and historical figures.[69]

Again, a critical look through the lens of Pizarnik's piece makes Perrault's murder tool stand out as an integral element in his text, which refocuses the tale on Bluebeard's senseless murders rather than the wife's transgression. Pizarnik insists on the presence and prominence of murder tools in the opening sections of the *The Bloody Countess* by detailing several of Countess Bathory's more elaborate torture devices, whose aim was always the death of the victim. The narrative then ushers readers into the Countess' Castle of Csejthe by highlighting the central function of the space as one of serial killing. In fact, the space itself emerges as an important symbolic figure when its walls and ceilings become bloodstained, just like the bloody floor in Perrault and just as the Countess' white dresses become repeatedly reddened throughout the text. Following a general outline of the daily torturous practices of the castle, readers fall through the

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40), a one-time comrade in arms to Joan of Arc (he was also a notorious pederast and murdered more than 140 children). This interpretation gained currency with the late Romantic revival of de Rais as a literary figure" (129). Penrose makes the same comparison of Bathory to de Rais in the introduction to *La comtesse sanglante* (vi).

[69] "Pizarnik nos presenta un personaje que no había sido reconocido, contrapartida a la larga lasta que integra la tradición mitológica de la crueldad masculine, comenzando por Gilles de Rais, y otres varones ilustres tan tentadores como Drácula, Barba Azul y el Marqués de Sade" (Pizarnik shows us a character that had not been recognized, a counterpart to the long list that integrates mythological tradition and masculine cruelty, beginning with Gilles de Rais and other notorious and seductive men like Dracula, Bluebeard, and the Marquis de Sade) (Haydu 116).

vignette entitled “Mirror of Melancholy” and into the Countess’ past, before arriving at a heightened and decidedly more magical version of the bloody chamber. Readers also encounter a counter-chamber in “Classic Torture,” which is a dungeon filled with sewing machines where the Countess makes use of the skilled seamstresses among her murder victims in wait. This counter-chamber is no longer necessary at the end of the piece. By then, the Countess has found a motive for her murders and prefers to stain not an endless array of white dresses but rather her entire body with blood.

What is important about these opening three vignettes are the relationships they draw between body and thing, or murder weapon, and how it sets the tone for Pizarnik’s reading of objects and bodies in the rest of the piece. In “Mirror of Melancholy,” for example, Countess Bathory surrounds herself by objects—talismans and material excess typical of a female aristocrat: dresses and jewelry—and oftentimes in *Bloody Countess* the boundary between body and object is a tenuous one. The three opening vignettes, “The Iron Virgin,” “Death by Water,” and “The Mortal Cage” further illustrate this point. The first and third vignettes describe torture devices that draw blood from their victims and exist within the castle, while the second, “Death by Water,” takes place in an external realm beyond the castle on its surrounding grounds. The weapon used here, water, provides a unique and nonbloody relationship to the victim’s body while maintaining traces of strong overtones of entrapment in the other two vignettes.

“The Iron Virgin,” for example, describes the “baroque interference” of a torture device that stabs its victim amidst an embrace:

> …this metallic lady was the size and color of a human creature. Naked, made up, bejeweled, with blonde hair that reached the floor, a latch would allow her lips to

open in a smile and for her eyes to move about. (282)[70]

The automaton is one example of Bathory's more elaborate torture devices: the life-like doll would hold young girls tightly and smile until five daggers quickly emerged[71] from its chest.[72] Pizarnik spends much of the vignette building up to the slow embrace between automaton and young girl. As such, the narrative gives readers time to consider the aesthetic aspects of the scene, to "contemplate" it like the Countess, "seated on her throne" (282).[73] The vexed and perverse nature of this embrace hinges on the murderous and ambiguous desire represented by the Iron Virgin.[74] What stands out in the initial description of the Iron Virgin are her lifelike stature, nakedness, ornateness and beauty, which is illustrated twice in the poem by making reference to her long, blonde hair—so long it touches the floor, in fact. Although reading the Countess Bathory as a female, hybrid Bluebeard figure is the main object of my analysis, it would be impossible to ignore the imagery in Pizarnik's detailed description of the Iron Virgin that calls out to leading ladies of other fairy tales. The long, blonde hair twice mentioned echoes

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[70] "esta dama metálica era del tamaño y del color de la criatura humana. Desnuda, maquilada, enjoyada, con rubios cabellos que llegaban al suelo, un mecanismo permitía que sus labios se abrieran en una sonrisa, que los ojos se movieran."

[71] This particular use of the knife strongly recalls murder the way the Grimms cast it: a plunge of the knife into the heart. This scene even reads as a reversal of the Grimms murder, as the knives emerge from the automaton's chest as if doubling back on their attacker.

[72] Pizarnik's body of work is peopled with dolls who wield epithets like "daughter of the wind" and "sleepwalker." Fiona Mackintosh includes dolls in the list of Pizarnik's mythemes (which is Vladimir Propp's word for essential and unchanging pieces of myth) and explores their talismanic functions in her article "Babes in the *Bosque*."

[73] "sentada en su trono."

[74] This scene could echo Pizarnik's own lesbian desire. See "Trac(k)ing Gender and Sexuality in the Writing of Alejandra Pizarnik" by Susana Chavez-Silverman, for example. The desire of the Countess and automaton are still murderous, however, and display a misogynistic bent; Pizarnik recounts the Countess' sexual assault of her female victims, which seems connected to this complex scene, although these sexual abuses lie outside the scope of this study.

Rapunzel's blonde locks. The Iron Virgin sleeps, "immobile in her coffin"[75] resembling the death-like repose of Sleeping Beauty (Pizarnik 283). When the Iron Virgin's gears begin to creak and arms begin to rise, however, an even stronger and sustained intertextual reference emerges from the narrative.

Mary de Morgan's 1877 fairy tale entitled "A Toy Princess" expresses the tension between human and machine in a thematic register similar to that of "The Iron Virgin." While de Morgan's text does not rewrite "La barbe bleue," it provides an example of a fairy tale with feminist undertones that resonates with Pizarnik's automaton. De Morgan's tale is one of a country where people who "grew so very polite that they hardly ever spoke to each other," also grow to prefer a mechanical, "toy" princess to a live, dynamically emotional one (MT 333). De Morgan tells the tale of a kingdom where it is considered poor manners to exhibit any display of emotion, and of a fairy godmother named Taboret who rescues an emotionally and creatively stifled young princess from a monotonous life in this restrictive environment. Taboret whisks the girl away to the seashore and replaces the real princess with a toy one. Ten years pass, and when Taboret learns the real princess intends to marry the son of a fisherman she becomes concerned about her decision. She decides to take the girl back to her palace, but not before she exposes to the king and queen the truth about their beloved toy princess: that she is little more than a hollow shell of a machine.

To convince the court of the truth, Taboret taps the toy princess on the head with her wand, and,

> …in a moment the head rolled on the floor, leaving the body standing motionless as before, and showing that it was but an empty shell. 'Just so,' said the head, as

[75] "inmóvil en su féretro."

it rolled towards the king. (MT 339)

Both de Morgan's frank tone and her illustration of a court that mourns a broken toy as if it were a living being resonate intertextually with "The Iron Virgin." Take the cold and detached tone of the "sham" princess, for example, that says, "Just so," as the head rolls across the floor; and later, when, reattached to the body, the head spins around slowly and politely addresses the joyful court with, "Certainly" (MT 341). At many points in her narrative, Pizarnik employs a tone during violent scenes that scholars identify as clinical or scientific, quite similar to the image de Morgan draws of a severed head rolling towards a King while its body stands nearby, murmuring platitudes all the way.

Consider, for example, Pizarnik's description of the Iron Virgin as it becomes an "assassin": "Suddenly, the decorated breasts of the iron lady open and five daggers appear, which pierce her live companion with the long wavy hair like her own" (Pizarnik 283).[76] Pizarnik's prose suggests the five daggers contribute to the Iron Virgin's beauty on a level equal to her necklace of precious stones and decorated breasts. Even the knives are beautified, and the vignette offers no bloody imagery. The only language that alludes to the murder is concise and indirect in its metaphorical nature. For example, the murder is referred to as a sacrifice; and the murder tool, the Iron Virgin, sleeps in her coffin once the deed is complete, implying that her victim, too, may merely be asleep rather than dead, and that the two bodies do indeed meld together during the course of the narrative. The image of entwined bodies sheds light on the vexed nature of the alternatively-penetrative, phallic knives that emerge from the Iron Virgin's chest

[76] "De pronto, los senos maquillados de la dama de hierro se abren y aparecen cinco puñales que atraviesen a su viviente compañera de largos cabellos sueltos como los suyos."

(Pizarnik 283). These knives penetrate alternatively in that, as phallic symbols, they target the heart rather than the victim's genitals.

An embrace precedes the victim's murder, an embrace that connotes desire and intimacy. When the automaton's five phallic knives emerge from its breasts, they create a penetrative scene of eroticized death. Indeed, the excessiveness of these five knives, especially in contrast to the one male phallus, sets the tone for the excessiveness of the entire piece. Rather than violating the genital area, the knives violate the safe and intimate area around the heart. This point is the bloody crux of a human body, and also symbolizes an emotional rather than purely sexual desire—a desire that the knives reject by targeting the heart. When the knives emerge, it is almost as if in reaction to the same-sex embrace. As the automaton and victim visually and physically meld into each other, they seem to both identify with and desire one another. The murderous gesture then rejects simultaneously identifying with and desiring the same object. That sexual overtones exist throughout Pizarnik's language, like her description of the murder as "consummated," supports this reading of desire between the Iron Virgin and victim (283).

Diana Fuss' "Fallen Women" is helpful in unpacking these resonances. In the piece, she discusses Freud's theorization of gender identification and how it affects desire, namely that it is impossible to both identify with and desire the same object. Fuss contests this notion:

> Freud in fact demonstrates their necessary collusion and collapsibility, the ever-present potential for one to metamorphose into, or turn back onto, the other. The instability of sexual identity lies in the capacity of its physical mechanisms *to desire and identify with each other* (69, italics in original).

Consequently, the knives seem to represent a hyperbolic renunciation of the same-sex love object, of both identifying with it and desiring it. Furthermore, if by desiring and

identifying with one another the sexual identities of the automaton and victim become unstable, this murderous gesture represents a violent renunciation of unstable sexual identity. The boundary between human and body also collapses in de Morgan's "Toy Princess," but to different ends.

In de Morgan's tale, emphasis is placed on the visual and spatial rather than desirous resonances between human body and machine: "the wizard…came back, leading by the hand a pretty little girl of about six years old—a girl so like the Princess Ursula no one could have told them apart," where the "pretty little girl" is a toy, an automaton (MT 336). This visual and spatial collapse also occurs in *The Bloody Countess*. Once caught in the Iron Virgin's "perfect" embrace, discerning where the live body ends and the iron one begins becomes impossible:

> The automaton embraces her, and now nobody will be able to untangle the live body from the iron body, both equal in beauty. Suddenly, the iron lady's decorated breasts open, and five daggers appear that pierce her living companion with long loose hair like her own. (283)[77]

Pizarnik repeatedly emphasizes the visual accordance between automaton and young girl, and illustrates their equal beauty a second time by highlighting their long, Rapunzel-like hair. In terms of fairy tales, one could say a hybrid Bluebeard (the Countess) looks on while an intertextual composite of Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty and the toy Princess kills her doppelgänger amidst an embrace. There is a level of voyeurism and mirroring at work here which emphasizes not only the hybridity of the Countess, at once embodying Bluebeard and the dead wives, but of the things that surround her, like this particular

[77] "La autómata la abraza y ya nadie podrá desanudar el cuerpo vivo del cuerpo de hierro, ambos iguales en belleza. De pronto, los senos maquillados de la dama de hierro se abren y aparecen cinco puñales que atraviesan a su viviente compañera de largos cabellos sueltos como los suyos."

murder weapon.

Again, before the violent rejection of the embrace occurs the girl and automaton arguably experience a sense of intimacy. Equally beautiful, equal in stature, extracting the young girl from the machine's embrace is impossible. In addition to echoing the sexually dominant relationships between Bathory and her murder victims, the relationship between girl and machine also mirrors the bonds between Bluebeard and his brides as Maria Tatar describes them in *Secrets Beyond the Door*: "By casting the killer as husband and the victim as wife, it adds the ingredients of intimacy, vulnerability, trust and betrayal to make the story all the more captivating" (14). The closeness between Bluebeard and his wives makes the murder story all the more fascinating, and a similar tactic seems to be at work in "The Iron Virgin." In describing Bluebeard's relationship to his wives Tatar does not include the theme of entrapment, which emerges strongly in Pizarnik's piece, and as an ideology in de Morgan's "Toy Princess." The Iron Virgin traps her victim much like the Countess traps a young girl in her body during "Death by Water," and imprisons another in "The Mortal Cage." Entrapment, death, beauty and sleep go hand-in-hand during the opening torturous vignettes of *The Bloody Countess*.

While entrapment is at work in "Death by Water," which follows "The Iron Virgin," the means of murder and the entire setting of this vignette deviate from the others. Its stylistic tone, however, is in keeping with "The Iron Virgin," and "The Mortal Cage"—each vignette is narrated in the present tense. Patricia Venti comments on the effects of this narrative choice in "La dama de estas ruinas."[78] Venti also compares the

[78] "Las tres viñetas se disponen como breves narraciones teatrales, contempladas por la condesa inmóvil. Al presenterlas así, el narrador consigue anular la distancia que impone el pretérito respecto de la situación y el personaje presentado, haciéndonos coincidir con

frank and unapologetic nature of this present tense narrative to "scientific" language, which distances Pizarnik's tone from the realm of the poetic prose and allows for comparison of her verse to de Morgan's in "A Toy Princess" (Venti 34).[79] The tone in "Iron Virgin" and "Toy Princess" that melds violence with frankness carries through to "Death by Water," where Pizarnik describes the weather and striking moments of violence with the same narrative voice:

> The path is snowy, and the dark lady wrapped in her skins sickens within the carriage. Suddenly she calls out the name of a young woman in her entourage. They bring her: the countess frantically bites and pokes her with needles. (Pizarnik 284)[80]

The girl escapes, wounded, but the entourage captures her anew and places her with the Countess in the carriage.[81] "Death by Water," is the first place readers learn that this bloody countess dreams up punishments to fit her servants' crimes, in much the same way that Bluebeard punishes self-expression and curiosity by silencing his brides in death. Again, the choice to punish his wives with silence implies that curiosity is some loud, imposing expression of self. The Countess employs a similar tactic: "to she who talked too much during work hours, the countess herself would sew up her mouth; or,

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la mirada de Erzébet Bathory" (The three vignettes set themselves up as brief theatrical narrations, contemplated by the immobile countess. By presenting them as such, the narrator is able to cancel out the distance imposed by the past tense with respect to the situation and the character, making the audience complicit in the gaze of Erzebet Bathory) (Venti 35).

[79] As we have seen in "Le petit chaperon rouge," Perrault nearly always uses the present tense in at least one sentence of his tales. This narrative choice signals immediacy and gives the sense of reading out loud.

[80] "el camino está nevado, y la sombría dama arrebujada en sus pieles dentro de la carroza se hastia. De repente formula el nombre de alguna muchacha de su séquito. Traen a la nomrada: la condesa muerde frenética y le clave agujas."

[81] It is worth mentioning that the Spanish word for carriage, "carroza," also means hearse. Pizarnik's comparisons of the countess to Lady Death seem entirely fitting for this alternate definition (Pizarnik 287).

contrarily, open the mouth of the girl and pull until her lips tore" (Pizarnik 287).[82]

True to form, the servant girl's punishment for running away in "Death by Water" is to become frozen, forever immobilized for her rebellious display of mobility:

> A circle of torches held by emotionless footmen surrounds the girl. They pour water over her body and the water becomes ice…the girl makes one small final gesture towards the torches, which are the only source of heat. They throw more water on her and now she remains, forever standing, erect, dead. (287)[83]

The girl becomes a statue. Beneath the ice, her youth and beauty are intact.[84] The frozen water sits atop the skin and does not modify her beauty as the other murder tools do in Pizarnik, or as the sword and scimitar intend to do in Perrault and the Grimms. In "Death by Water," the body itself entraps the victim. Pizarnik's prose echoes this vignette later in the piece when she describes the Countess' vanity as driven by a desire to immobilize her beauty "like a dream of stone," frozen like the statue (291). The connection Pizarnik creates between beauty and stone seems to draw from one of Perrault's images in "La barbe bleue." When the young bride begs forgiveness for her disobedience, Perrault muses, "her beauty and pain would have softened even stone, but Blue Beard's heart was harder than stone" (MT 167).

While the Countess desires her beauty to be frozen in a stone-like dream, Bluebeard's heart is so hardened that not even beautiful pain can soften it. Although heat

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[82] "a la que había conversado mucho en horas de trabajo, la misma condesa le cosía la boca o, contrariamente, le abría la boca y tiraba hasta que los labios se desgarraban."

[83] "La rodea un círculo de antorchas sostenidas por lacayos impasibles. Vierten el agua sobre su cuerpo y el agua se vuelve hielo…hay un leve gesto final de la muchacha por acercarse más a las antorchas, de donde emana el único calor. Le arrojan más agua y ya se queda, para siempre de pie, erguida, muerta"

[84] In her chapter from *Secrets Beyond the Door* entitled "The Art of Murder: Bluebeard as Artist and Aesthete," Tatar observes that, "Bluebeard's work can…take an aesthetic turn, and fin-de-si*ècle* writers found in the folkloric villain a powerful model for the artist who must preserve and nourish his creative energies by killing his beloved" (152). A similar sentiment seems at work in "Death by Water" as the Countess crafts a statue.

and the closeness of bodies may seem to fuel desire, the opposite is true for both Bluebeard and the Countess. Again, the immobilization of beauty seen in "Death by Water" emphasizes the difference between its murder method and those of the other vignettes in Pizarnik's piece. Water coats the body. It remains external and creates a cage around the girl, whereas material that penetrates the body modifies its appearance. "Death by Water" then creates tension between stasis and mobility, while simultaneously reiterating elements of entrapment that occur in the vignettes that house it.

As previously mentioned, the vignette's locale further illustrates its uniqueness. "Death by Water" occurs outside the castle grounds in an in-between state, whereas all the other murder scenes occur in one of three chambers of varying degrees of bloodiness. As Tatar says, "the Bluebeard story begins on the outside—in the realm of the familiar, common, and quotidian—and moves to the inside—the exotic, dangerous, passionate and barbaric" (*Secrets*, 2). "Death by Water" provides evidence that *The Bloody Countess* tends to follow the structure set forth by Tatar. Its external setting falls early in the piece, and as the narrative progresses readers enter the castle more deeply. Furthermore, the closer the Countess and her victims get to the castle and the deeper they descend into the bloody chambers, the closer the piece relates to "La barbe bleue." As the narrative moves into the castle, the bloodstain of the key and the floor of the forbidden room in "La barbe bleue" appears in various forms—the first of which occurs in "The Mortal Cage."

This vignette, which follows "Death by Water" and precedes "Classic Torture," combines elements of the two preceding vignettes: fluidity and entrapment. Its title refers to a cage, "Covered with knives and adorned with sharp steep points, its size holds a

human body" (284).[85] One of Countess Bathory's servants would coax a girl into the cage and hoist it into the air while the Countess, "the sleepwalker dressed in white" [86] sat directly beneath it (284). This scene marks Pizarnik's first call out to the Countess' white dress, which appears repeatedly in various stages of creation and whiteness throughout the prose poem. Readers hear of the white dresses being sewn by murder victims in wait in the counter-chamber, as part of a costume change, or stained with red blood.[87] The dress becomes part of the Countess' description in nearly every murder scene that follows, emphasizing the contrasting red stain as if the dress desires to be reddened and later changed again in a cycle that mirrors the serial murders of the castle. The next vignette, "Classic Torture," amplifies this bloodstain, which only continues to intensify as Pizarnik's piece progresses.

Again, Pizarnik delineates between classic torture instruments and more elaborate devices. She describes the latter set of tools as "baroque interferences," and these include the first three vignettes of the prose poem, "The Iron Virgin," "Death by Water," and "The Mortal Cage." Pizarnik seems to privilege these three murder methods by placing them at the opening of her piece, and in the fourth vignette, "Classic Torture," further emphasizes the importance of these devices by implying that they were rarely used, perhaps only on special occasions: "except for some baroque interferences…the countess

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[85] "tapizada con cuchillos y adornada con filosas puntas de acero, su tamaño admite un cuerpo humano."
[86] "la sonámbula vestida de blanco."
[87] In her book *Knives and Angels*, Susan Bassnett compares Plath and Pizarnik's use of ancient myths and Goddess figures, "whose primourdial colors occur throughout the poetry of both women—red, white and black" (285). Bassnett does not mention "The Bloody Countess," but its repeated image of a white dress stained in contrasting red certainly seems to support her claim.

adhered to a style of torture that was monotonously classic" (285).[88] Pizarnik implies that the more elaborate murder tools, like the Mortal Cage and Iron Virgin, somehow represent a rupture in the Countess' routine killings. Their use marks a shift in her system, and the devices are perhaps less preferable than the simple blades of scissors, shears or razors on her substantial list of "classic" torture devices (285). It is also in "Classic Torture" that Pizarnik paints a scene closely resembling the blood-ridden chamber of Bluebeard, and goes so far as to align her Countess not only with the killer but with the victims, with Bluebeard's dead wives. She does this in two ways: first, through a through a reconsideration of the bloodstain on the tiny key in Perrault; and second, by drawing on the mirror-like pool of blood in the forbidden room of "La barbe bleue."

The enchanted bloodstain on the key to the secret office is an integral image in the Bluebeard tales, and has been linked closely to "Fitcher's Bird," where the bloodstain instead appears on an enchanted egg. As is the case in "Fitcher's bird," another object becomes repeatedly stained in "The Bloody Countess" – it is the white dress Bathory wears ceremonially during murder scenes: "the blood would surge like a geyser, and the white dress of the lady of the night would turn red" (285).[89] Unlike the young bride in "La barbe bleue" however, the Countess is in control of the stain and easily removes it by pausing the torturous performance for a costume change. What has been up to this point a clinical and frank approach to the murderous vignettes ruptures as the narrator's voice interjects to comment on this bloodstain and its remedy, the costume change.

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[88] "salvo algunas interferencias barrocas…la condesa adhería a un estilo de torturar monótonamente clásico."

[89] "la sangre manaba como un géiser y el vestido blanco de la dama nocturna se volvía rojo."

Parenthetically, Pizarnik muses: "what would she think about during this brief interruption?" (285).[90] In terms of "La barbe bleue," one might read the Countess' gesture as something akin to making a copy of the key. As such, the Countess has the capacity to regenerate her dress and conquer the bloodstain, unlike Bluebeard's eighth wife in Perrault's tale. Yet, Countess Bathory's desire to remove the stain somehow aligns her with the dead wives at the same time that her success separates her from them—recall that the eighth wife in "La barbe bleue" frantically tries to wash the blood from the key before Bluebeard arrives home. Bathory's behavior towards her bloodstained dresses and is not very different, and draws a parallel between bloody dress and bloody key.

Again, some fairy-tale scholars challenge the privileging of the key as an integral image in "La barbe bleue." Bacchilega, for instance, laments the key as a motif that causes readers to overlook other symbolic activity that might attribute agency or intelligence to the young bride. In *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, she proposes that the story's bloody key has been given far too much attention as a symbol of the wife's transgression, and the bloody chamber has been overlooked as a necessary step in her initiation. Bacchilega comments:

> If the 'Forbidden Chamber' rather than the 'Bloody Key' is treated as the tale's central motif, then 'Bluebeard' is no longer primarily about the consequences of failing a test—will the heroine be able to control her curiosity?—but about a process of initiation which *requires* entering the forbidden chamber…the test is whether she can acquire this knowledge and then use it cleverly enough to triumph over death. (107)

By signaling the bloody chamber as an integral step in the process of initiation, however, critics cannot completely discount the key—it is the tool the young brides must use to

[90] "¿en qué pensaría durante esa breve interrupción?"

enter the forbidden room and begin the process of initiation. Chamber and key are inextricably linked, and in *The Bloody Countess* the female Bluebeard figure certainly enjoys authority over both. Countess Bathory's desire to remove the red stain provides a nuance in her character that distances her from Bluebeard and aligns her with the dead wives. In another reading of the rite of initiation Bacchilega mentions, the key might function as a secondary murder tool—a tool of foreplay—as it completes a necessary step in revealing the girl's betrayal of her husband's command.

As mentioned above, in addition to echoing the bloody key Pizarnik's description of space in this vignette resembles an earlier forbidden chamber by drawing on its bloody mirror. In "Classic Torture," it is not only the dress that becomes stained, but the walls and ceilings as well: "The walls and the ceiling were also dyed red." (285).[91] These bloody walls recall the bloodstained floor in Perrault's "La barbe bleue." In this scene, the French reflexive verb, "se mirer" (to see oneself reflected in) suggests that the puddle of blood functions as a mirror for the seven corpses of Bluebeard's wives, who hang from the wall with their eyes downcast: "the corpses of several women that had been hung along the walls could forever see their reflection" (MT 166). Pizarnik seems to draw from this mirroring capacity of the blood when she describes the Countess gazing longingly into her mirror of melancholy in the next vignette, and her behavior is the second way in which she resembles the dead wives in Perrault's "La barbe bleue."

The Bloody Countess experiences a considerable stylistic shift as readers fall through the vignette, "The Mirror of Melancholy" and into a world of sorcery, black magic, and the bloodiest chamber of them all. While gazing into the mirror, the Countess

[91] "también los muros y el techo se teñían de rojo."

shifts from resembling Bluebeard to resembling his dead wives before shifting back again to Bluebeard in the final bloody chamber. Bluebeard's dead wives stare into their reflection in a pool of blood just as the Countess gazes, inert, into the mirror of melancholy. This vignette arguably functions as a centerpiece in *The Bloody Countess* for a few reasons. From Pizarnik's prose, readers learn that the Countess designed the mirror herself and that she spent many hours transfixed, like the dead wives, by her reflection:

> *…she lived before her grand, dark mirror, the famous mirror that she had designed herself…* It was so comfortable that it provided some protruding pieces in which to support her arms such that she could spend many hours before it without tiring. We can guess that having believed her to design a mirror, the Countess also drew up the plans of her castle. (289, italics in original)[92]

For Pizarnik, the mirror reveals insights about the Countess' preferences and her personal behavior. Because she designed the mirror, it is likely that she designed the entire castle. In this section of the piece, beyond the mirror of melancholy, readers first learn that the Countess' serial murders may be based on a motive: "Countess Bathory's grandest obsession had always been to distance old age at whatever the price," even if the price was slashing the arteries of young, innocent women to bathe in their blood (291).[93] Pizarnik implies that the Countess' obsession with immobilizing her beauty and with freezing her youth has always been present, but gives no hint of this obsession earlier in the piece beyond the Countess' fascination with the frozen body of a young girl in "Death by Water."

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[92]" *…vivía delante de su gran espejo sombrío, el famoso espejo cuyo modelo había diseñado ella misma…* Tan confortable era que presentaba unos salientes en donde apoyar los brazos de manera de permanecer muchas horas frente a él sin fatigarse. Podemos conjeturar que habiendo creído diseñar un espejo, Erzébet trazó los planos de su morada."

[93] "la mayor obsesión de Erzébet había sido siempre alejar a cualquier precio la vejez."

That is to say, the Countess' impulse to murder in a serial manner and her obsession with vanity appear to exist all along, but only through black magic of her sorceress does the latter become a motive for the former. If the impulse to murder serially existed from the beginning and finds a convenient explanation towards the end, then the way in which Pizarnik highlights the murder tools early on in her text privileges the image of the Countess as a senseless serial killer rather than a murderer with a motive. The motive arrives too late, and Bathory's die has been cast as a killer of the innocent. To read "La barbe bleue" backwards through this lens yields a similar outcome, where the wife's insatiable curiosity is not a condition of the husband's impulse to kill.

The central themes of *The Bloody Countess* then hinge on this mirror, and what falls before and beyond it in terms of content. In "Mirror of Melancholy" Pizarnik delves more deeply into the Countess' psychological state by commenting on melancholia, likely in reference to Freud: "She continued with the theme of the mirror. If it does not quite *explain* this sinister figure, it is essential to consider the fact that concerned the evil of the sixteenth century: melancholia" (Pizarnik 290).[94] Pizarnik associates Bathory's melancholic moments with the hours she spends gazing into the mirror and describes in detail how it affects her body—rendering it as corpse-like as Bluebeard's dead wives. Pizarnik's description of this melancholic state as a site of internal conflict lends itself to a reading of the Countess' melancholy where her mourning is engendered by losing some part of her self: her beauty. That she consistently makes efforts to maintain this beauty aligns itself further with Freudian melancholia: "melancholia involves a denial of loss,

[94] "continuó con el tema del espejo. Si bien no se trata de *explicar* a esta siniestra figura, es preciso detenerse en el hecho de que padecía el mal del siglo XVI: la melanchoía. "

which emerges from an initial acknowledgment of this loss and provokes its perpetual articulation" (Bronfen 64). Bathory's torturous murders represent the perpetual denial and simultaneous articulation of her loss.[95]

As she mourns her beauty, the mirror inspires a melancholy that leads the Countess to adopt black magic: "Her total adhesion to black magic had to result in the perpetual and complete conservation of her 'divine treasure'" (291).[96] Pizarnik objectifies the Countess' beauty by referring to it as a treasure, something to be discovered, maintained, guarded and preserved, and she does so through bathing in the blood of her victims. "The Mirror of Melancholy," introduces first the Countess and then the bloodiest of chambers, where, spurred on by the beliefs of her sorceress Darvulia, the Countess would bathe in vats of human blood. Pizarnik implies that Darvulia also comes from a tradition of folklore, as "*the sorceress of the forest*, the one that scared us in children's books" (292).[97] To fuel the Countess' beauty routine, her servants would cut veins and arteries of the victims and store their blood in large vases to be poured over the Countess' naked body. Again, in the final incarnation of the bloody chamber, what becomes stained in red is not the Countess' white dress but her body itself, drawing a parallel between bloody key, dress, and body.

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[95] In Judith Butler's "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," she explains that "a melancholic identification is central to that process whereby the gendered character of the ego is assumed" (22). In the piece, Butler proposes that melancholia occurs during gender identification. Assuming a stable sexual identity implies the negation and the rejection any other possible sexuality. To identify as one gender is to experience the melancholia of internalizing the gender that is prohibited. The loss is preserved in the psyche, an "ungrievable loss" (24). Such melancholia of gender identification may be at work in the Countess.

[96] "su total adhesión a la magia negra tenía que dar por resultado la intacta y perpetua conservación de su 'divino tesoro.'"

[97] "*la hechicera del bosque*, la que nos asustaba desde los libros para niños."

The Countess' murderous habits find a motive in black magic and the beliefs of Darvulia, her aging sorceress. While the motive arrives too late in the piece to alter Bathory's persona as a serial killer, it is nonetheless interesting to consider this notion of an older female figure consuming the beauty of a youthful counterpart in light of the history of fairy tales. This motive ties in closely to one narrative frame in particular, where an aging and powerful woman experiences envy at the sight of more youthful expressions of beauty. Consider, for instance, the Grimms' version of "Schneewittchen un die sieben Zwerge" ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarves") where a murderous stepmother hatches elaborate plans to kill Snow White and reclaim her spot as the fairest of the land, all the while depending on the authority of a magical mirror. In *The Bloody Countess* Pizarnik includes a nearly-magical mirror, an ancient sorceress who advises Bathory in the art of blood baths, and emphasizes that Bathory murders these six hundred young virgins in an attempt to fend off old age, in effect, to be the fairest of them all. While Bluebeard murders potential wives, Countess Bathory murders potential daughters who possess the key to youthful beauty. In addition to Haydu, other scholars take note of the fairy-tale-like qualities in the poetic world designed by Pizarinik. While she does not link *The Bloody Countess* directly to the character Bluebeard in Perrault's "La barbe bleue," Patricia Venti comments on the fairy-tale quality of the subterranean world inhabited by Bathory and her servants.[98]

[98] Venti loosely links *La condesa* to fairy tales, but not explicitly to "Bluebeard" : " 'La condesa sangrienta' está proxima al mundo de los cuentos de hadas pero los cambios no occurren a título de compensación moral, como castigo o recompensa, sino que son indicios y consecuencia de la escenia de un mundo subterráneo y maléfico" (*The Bloody Countess* is close to the fairy tale world, but changes do not occur in terms of punishment or moral recompense, the piece represents an index and the result of scenes staged in a malevolent underworld) (27).

Furthermore, when we consider the torture chamber Pizarnik features so prominently at the beginning of her piece many intertextual, and even subterranean, resonances emerge between Pizarnik and Angela Carter, who "rewrites 'Bluebeard' from the point of view of the wife, letting us see inside a mind to which we do not have access in the fairy tale" (Tatar, *Secrets* 9).[99] Carter's famed feminist retelling of "La barbe bleue," entitled "The Bloody Chamber," presents a torture chamber strikingly similar to the one outlined by Pizarnik in *The Bloody Countess*.[100] Indeed, Pizarnik seems to invite her readers to stumble upon the Countess' torture chamber in much the same way that Carter outlines her heroine's horror at the discovery of her husband's secret room.[101]

What prompts the heroine in "The Bloody Chamber" to enter her husband's "subterranean privacy," is the promise that she might "find a little of his soul," and Pizarnik's musings on the Countess' internal conflicts in "Mirror of Melancholy" suggest a similar motive (Carter 27). In Pizarnik's introduction to *The Bloody Countess*, she also uses the word "subterranean" to describe Bathory's castle and, more specifically "the torture chamber" (Pizarnik 282). Each author signals a descent into these chambers, and describes or invites shock at the discovery of what lies beyond. It is as if Pizarnik's

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[99] Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" has also been compared to *The Bloody Countess*. See *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Baldick).

[100] "Like Angela Carter, Pizarnik was fascinated by the darker side of fairy-tales, the wolf with fangs that drip blood, the murderous stepmother, the dolls with hearts of mirrors, that people the landscape of the Central European folklore of her ancestry" (Mackintosh 149).

[101] Although it seems unlikely that Carter was directly influenced by Pizarnik, the dates of their texts are worth restating. Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* was first published as a piece of literary criticism on Penrose's *La comtesse sanglante* in the journal *Testigo* in 1966. Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" was published in 1979. The first English translation of Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* did not appear until 1985 in Alberto Manguel's collection *Other Fires: Short Fiction by Latin American Women*, published by Three Rivers Press.

readers turn the same key that Carter's heroine does, and that the decision read to on would be to explore, like the heroine, "in a cold ecstasy to know the very worst" (Carter 28). Carter moves immediately from the turn of the key and the creak of the door to the spectacle of the torture chamber:

> And now my taper showed me the outlines of a rack. There was also a great wheel, like the ones I had seen in woodcuts of the martyrdoms of the saints in my old nurse's little store of holy books. And – just one glimpse of it before my little flame caved in and I was left in absolute darkness – a metal figure, hinged at the side, which I knew to be spiked on the inside and to have the name: the Iron Maiden. (28)

Carter describes a litany of three torture devices—rack, wheel and Iron Maiden—just as Pizarnik does at the outset of *The Bloody Countess*.

What first stands out are the authors' comparable nods to an Iron Maiden (Carter) and an Iron Virgin (Pizarnik). Although Carter's portrayal of the Iron Maiden differs from Pizarnik's Iron Virgin, it closely resembles Pizarnik's description of the Mortal Cage: "covered with knives and adorned with sharp points of steel, its size admits a human body," (Pizarnik 284).[102] Though they do not rely on precisely the same torture devices, both Carter and Pizarnik set forth the idea of a deadly intimacy in these chambers. For example, Carter's affirmation that her heroine discovers "a room designed for desecration and some dark night of unimaginable lovers whose embraces were annihilation," resonates with Pizarnik's depiction of the Iron Virgin, where the embrace of the Countess Bathory's fairy-tale-like automaton is equally intimate and annihilative (Carter 28). Furthermore, Carter's choice of the word "designed" seems to echo Pizarnik's portrayal of the Countess as the designer of her melancholic mirror, and likely

[102] "Tapizada con cuchillos y adornada con filosas puntas de acero, su tamaño admite un cuerpo humano."

the entire castle.

A comparative reading of Carter and Pizarnik thus emphasizes the elaborate design and forethought required of a killer to construct such parallel, subterranean torture chambers. There exists in each case some intrinsic need or impulse on the part of the killers, Pizarnik's Countess Bathory and Carter's Marquis, that is detached from any clear motive or transgression on the part of their victim. Again, this analysis calls attention not to the genetically insatiable curiosity of Bluebeard's wives, but to the hunger of the serial killers themselves. Sylvia Plath's poem "Bluebeard" and Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Bluebeard's Daughter" also make stylistic choices that shift attention from the tale's transgressive women to Bluebeard himself, or, in the case of Warner, to his daughter. This shift in focus hinges on the authors' conceptions of the murder tools as harmful scopic instruments. Additionally, the hybridity observed in the character of Countess Bathory carries through to Warner's story, as Bluebeard's daughter simultaneously represents Bluebeard and his third dead wife.

What Bluebeard Saw

The habitual nature of the murders in Pizarnik's *The Bloody Countess* finds a counterpart in Sylvia Plath's short, repetitive poem "Bluebeard." The question of habit, with perhaps a stronger relationship to fate than that of the poem, also emerges in Sylvia Townsend Warner's short story, "Bluebeard's Daughter." With namesakes for authors, these pieces were written just over a decade apart. Warner's story is a selection from *The Cat's Cradle Book*, published in 1940; and Plath's "Bluebeard" hails from the early

1950s, the age of a docile feminine ideal.[103] Each rewrite engages explicitly with the inevitable theme of insatiable curiosity surrounding the "Bluebeard" tales, and each piece does so with reference to scopic instruments; Plath refers to an x-ray machine and a darkroom while Warner incorporates a telescope near the very end of her piece.[104] Use of the x-ray and use of the telescope aid the authors in commenting on curiosity in their pieces, but function in quite different ways. What also emerges in each piece is the theme of endurance as it encompasses curiosity and agency. This agency is one of sheer intrepidness, it is not immediately realized and requires waiting, bearing, and enduring Bluebeard—an echo, perhaps, of the Countess Bathory, who would awaken her victims in a variety of painful manners if they should faint too early during their stay in the final and bloodiest chamber (Pizarnik 292).

Plath meditates on endurance in a subtle and implicitly sinister way in "Bluebeard," and the form and temporal register of her poem contribute to its thematic development. The poem begins with the lines, "I am sending back the key / that let me into bluebeard's study;" (305). Plath follows her speaker's assertion that she is now, presently, sending back the key with a justification for her decision: "because he would make love to me" (305). The verb "would" signals repetitive action. Whatever Bluebeard does to Plath's speaker occurs repeatedly, and unlike the other wives she invokes by dropping his name, Plath's speaker survives. She endures the process of

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[103] "Bluebeard" is one of a selection of fifty early poems that are dated "mainly in the three or four years preceding 1956" in Plath's *Collected Poems.*

[104] Bluebeard's gaze is harmfully penetrating, and calls to mind Laura Mulvey's theorization of the male gaze in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey explains that in film, the woman is often seen as other, as an object and not a subject. She represents the unconscious desire of the male and is passive, unable to speak for herself. As we will see, both Plath's speaker and Warner's female protagonist challenge Bluebeard's desirous, murderous, objectifying gaze in different ways.

Bluebeard's "love-making," and decides to renounce it. Her use of the continuous present in the opening line creates the feeling that readers are eavesdropping or bearing witness to an affirmation that has just occurred to the speaker, as if by epiphany.

Furthermore, the punctuation surrounding this repeated line, semicolons and colons, have linking qualities and lack a sense of finality—the grammar illustrates that the speaker must talk herself into this decision, repeatedly affirming it to herself. By the end of the piece she is resolute: "I am sending back the key / that let me into bluebeard's study," is the last line of the poem and ends with a pointed period. Plath structures the poem as one continuous sentence broken up with semicolons and a colon—as if its message mirrors the form of one unbroken, albeit disjointed, frame of thought. Plath's speaker reflects on what she repeatedly endures in Bluebeard's study. She reaches a decision about the key, and, implicitly, curiosity. Endurance provides a similar, decisive result in Warner's "Bluebeard's Daughter." What Plath's speaker endures occurs within Bluebeard's study, however, and what Warner's characters endure occurs in an environment outside the forbidden room.

Warner's modern short story uniquely extends Bluebeard's family line and claims at its outset that Bluebeard's murderous appetite overshadowed for many, "unless it be here and there a Director of Oriental Studies," that Bluebeard had a daughter.[105] "Bluebeard's Daughter," tells the tale of young Djamileh's tearful and confused reaction to her father's death, how Aunt Ann and Fatima ignored her father's "exemplary and flawless" will and attempted to whisk her away from the castle of her childhood, called

[105] From Warner's mention of "Oriental Studies" in the opening line it is clear that her story "belongs to a tradition in English of Orientalized 'Bluebeard' tales that stretches back to the eighteenth century, when Orientalism first took hold in Europe" (MT 367).

"Shady Transports," and how her true guardian Badruddin retrieved both Djamileh and her wealth from the unsavory situation. While in his care, a young and impressionable Djamileh hears Badruddin condemn the "displeasing" and insatiable nature of female curiosity (MT 370). From then on, Djamileh resolves to suppress her curious inclinations and does not ask a question for three whole weeks (370). She falls ill from this unhealthy behavior, and once well again realizes it is "not enough to refrain from asking questions, some more radical method of combating curiosity must be found" (370). Not long afterwards, Badruddin arranges for Djamileh's marriage. Just over fifteen years old, Djamileh and her young groom Kayel return to live at the castle she has inherited, "Shady Transports." The two explore happily, but Kayel soon becomes obsessed with opening a secret door in the castle for which there appears to be no key. Djamileh, resolute in her belief that some doors must not be opened, has hidden its corresponding key with that telltale "small dark stain that might have been a bloodstain" (MT 374).

This is where the test of endurance begins—how long will Djamileh withhold her key from Kayel and to what lengths will he go for a look inside the closet? In the end, separated from one another on a journey to Teheran for a divorce inspired by the tensions surrounding the room, Djamileh and Kayel meet again at the threshold of the chamber. Neither one, however, enters completely, as Djamileh arrives to find Kayel with a collarbone broken from breaking down the door, and his health takes precedence over what might lie beyond the threshold. The only hint that something more sinister could lie beyond are the "seven vast rubies hanging from the ceiling," most likely in reference to Bluebeard's seven dead brides that adorn the walls of the chamber in Perrault, and this brilliant surface of their pooled blood. While Kayel is healing, the young couple

reconciles and has a discussion about curiosity. Djamileh concludes that its inevitably destructive nature is akin to an overpowering stream, and that it must be channeled into a useful pursuit: “In other words, Kayel, it seems to me that, since we cannot do away with our curiosity, we had best sublimate it, and take up the study of science” (MT 380).

What Djamileh and Kayel endure occurs outside the forbidden chamber while what Plath’s speaker endures occurs within. In either case, however, the locked room is the source of the characters’ need to suppress or ride out some desire or event. Although at first Djamileh withholds the key from Kayel and it is he who endures the urge to look beyond the door, both are overcome with the need to enter the room by the story’s end. Warner sets up the theme of endurance for Djamileh long before her marriage, however. Before the chamber is reintroduced to Djamileh upon her arrival at “Shady Transports,” Warner describes the harmful effect that Djamileh’s blue hair and blue lips had on her childhood relationships. Later on Warner also recounts how Kayel partially marries Djamileh out of pity for her blue hair (MT 371). In this sense, the forbidden closet is just one more way in which Djamileh must endure the blueness of her heritage. Warner then comments on the chamber as inextricably linked to Bluebeard and his descendants, and implies that the habit of opening the door is inescapable as well.

As we have seen, however, Djamileh attempts to avoid the door’s allure and deter her husband, who she never believed could “wear such a look of cupidity or that his eyes could become so beady” by hiding the key from him in her dress (MT 374). Indeed, she keeps the key on her person until the very last scene of the story when she leans over her wounded husband and it falls from its hiding place. That Kayel enters the chamber without the key may renders his descent into the room incomplete when read through

Plath's poem, where the key is a requisite instrument for getting beyond the door. By her plan to return it, the speaker implies that without it she will no longer be able to enter "bluebeard's study" (305). While Plath's speaker becomes more and more resolute in her desire to "send back the key" with every repetition of these words, Djamileh is less and less sure of her decision to hide it:

> All this while she was carrying about that key on her person, and debating whether she should throw it away, in case Kayel, by getting possession of it, should endanger his life, or whether she should keep it and use it herself the moment he was safely out of the way" (MT 376).

This distinction foregrounds the different stages of Perrault's plot in "La barbe bleue" that each character experiences in Warner and Plath's pieces, and how they affect each woman's relationship with the key. In Perrault the wife has a prechamber state and a postchamber state. Plath's speaker, on the other hand, has endured the chamber repeatedly, survived, and renounces the key as if by doing so she might also renounce the entire chamber. They are inextricably linked. Warner's Djamileh, however, exists in a pre-entrance state and as such cannot be sure about her relationship to the key and by extension, to the forbidden room. Plath's speaker possesses a knowledge and opinion simply inaccessible to Warner's Djamileh, and their different relationships to this key reveal in part each text's relationship to curiosity. In comparing Plath's speaker and Djamileh, it is also worth considering further their relationship to the Bluebeard figure himself.

In the context of Perrault's narrative, Plath's speaker reads as a curious wife who has entered the chamber habitually. While the only concrete reason she gives for sending back the key is "because he would make love to me," it can be inferred that a secondary reason is because "in his eye's dark room I can see / my X-rayed heart, dissected body"

(305). Plath accomplishes many things in the space of these short two lines; she compares Bluebeard's eye to a darkroom, an operating room, and an x-ray machine. There are layers of symbolism at work here, not the least of which is the metaphorical overlap of his vision and his penis, both of which penetrate her. Beginning with Bluebeard's eye, the x-ray mirror of her own death, will be helpful to our reading.

By the line "his eye's darkroom," Plath has not capitalized the word "bluebeard." That she does not use the name metonymically, as does Perrault, could signify her choice to highlight the character's eyes as the more horrifying physical characteristic than the othering blue beard.[106] Furthermore, "bluebeard's" eyes are the portal to the bloody chamber in Plath's poem. If Bluebeard's chamber lies in his eyes, in his gaze, then the chamber should die with him rather than being passed on, as is the case in both Perrault and Warner. The eye becomes more sinister than the blue beard—more akin to the sex organ—once it is compared to an operating room and an x-ray, and even when compared to a darkroom as well.

That the Bluebeard in Plath's poem has eyes like a darkroom might serve to link him to a tradition of Bluebeard retellings that Maria Tatar discusses in *Secrets Beyond the Door*: "Twentieth century literature and film offer up a variety of Bluebeards who write, paint, or photograph their way to immortality and notoriety in the arts" (153). Recall that Plath's Bluebeard plays three roles in the poem: a doctor who x-rays, a photographer with a darkroom, and a scientist who dissects. If the photograph seems the least invasive and

[106] Recall that in "Le petit chaperon rouge," the uncapitalized "red riding hood" opens the narrative for a reading in which the girl, the little red riding hood, is nearly consumed by her cape. Throughout his collection Perrault seems to comment on how his characters' monikers operate as metaphor or metonymy, and as such gain or do not gain complete status as characters.

harmful of the three, why, then, would the act of taking photos be so violent for Plath's speaker? While Warner's Bluebeard boasts quite the impressive collection of swords and knives, he was also an "intellectual," with a full library and strong interest in poetry (MT 370). Plath's Bluebeard then reads as a blood-crazed aesthete of a doctor with a photography hobby, but remains on par with Warner's conception of a learned serial killer. Consider, however, that Bluebeard's eye functions like a self-developing film camera. Its captured image, likely that of the speaker, undergoes an involved process of development and represents one more way in which the speaker endures Bluebeard for a lengthy period of time. Plath's line continues as if in a gradation of the symbolic components of Bluebeard's murder instrument that becomes more violent and more specific as it progresses from camera to x-ray to scalpel: "in his eye's darkroom I can see / my X-rayed heart, dissected body" (305).

Yet, there is a level of discord between x-ray and scalpel in terms of the body parts they target. It is the speaker's heart that is x-rayed while her body is dissected. Different instruments, then, seem useful for different purposes in the world of Plath's poem: penis, photo, x-ray and knife each penetrate in a different way, whether figuratively or literally, but by the end of the poem it is clear that even the most benign photograph somehow reads as invasive as a penis or a knife. To penetrate physically, as with a penis or a knife, reads as violently as penetrating more figuratively, as with an x-ray or a photograph. Furthermore, this dissected body is the only reference made to blood or any form of a bloodstain. While being photographed or being x-rayed are invasive processes, these methods would not modify the body of the speaker. To dissect, however, implies violent, visual modification of the body and carries scientific nuances.

While a photograph and even an x-ray could be made as gestures of goodwill or of aid, to dissect a body is to dehumanize it—to animalize it in the same sense Bluebeard's wives became taxidermy victims adorning his walls. The dissection also implies loss of the body's integrity. Disjointed and separated from its limbs and organs, the speaker's skeleton and musculature incomplete. Her voice, however, survives. After this physically and emotionally violent penetration of her body and heart, Plath's speaker endures, persists, and claims she is "sending back the key" (305). There is something triumphant and victorious about the speaker's survival, although it may be easy to overlook amidst the violent summary of what she has endured. Jessica McCort, for example, lets the poem's violence overshadow the speaker's affirmation that she is "sending back the key."

For McCort, the repetition of this phrase reads as desperate rather than victorious. McCort views Plath's "Bluebeard" poem as one more way in which she comments on the harmful effects of fairy tales, her fear of male sexuality, and even her own sexuality. As was the case with McCort's reading of "Stone Boy with Dolphin," her premise is an autobiographical one, linking Plath's use of fairy tale to her personal "dashed romantic expectations" (170). For McCort, Plath's use of Bluebeard marks a shift in Plath's understanding of her own sexuality:

> Furthermore, through her appropriation of a fairy tale that is explicitly violent as a frame for her examination of supposed romantic fantasy, Plath primarily lays bare the girl's wariness of the marriage bed, the still mysterious sexual act that takes place there, and the killing ritual that it signifies in her imagination. Any resistance of the girl to this ritual, the poem suggests, is futile, a futility which Plath captures in her repetition of the lines "I am sending back the key. (138)

Through this lens, Plath does not and cannot escape the gaze of the male Bluebeard. Yet, the underlying theme of endurance in the piece suggests the speaker's survival as well as

her escape. In Plath's poem, the speaker might have more of a chance to escape the chamber that is so persistent in Djamileh's story simply by sending back the key, despite McCort's assertions that "the girl remains submissive to the man's obsessive, invasive gaze" (308). Plath's choice of the verb "sending" is revelatory, as it implies a certain distance between the speaker and Bluebeard's study—more so than an action like "handing," or "giving." If Plath's speaker has already emotionally and psychologically escaped to a point where she can imagine sending back the key, then she might indeed escape completely and physically by sending back the key.

While McCort's reading of a harmful curiosity that subjects Plath's speaker to a desirous male gaze does not seem productive in terms of female agency, neither does the idea that the speaker can escape completely by sending back the key—not quite, at least. While the speaker has endured the darkroom of the eye and sent back the key, the implication is still that she leaves scarred and somewhat bloody. What comment does Plath then make on exploration? On curiosity? Plath's use of the invasive x-ray gaze finds illumination in Warner's use of the telescope near the end of her story.

Once Djamileh and Kayel have decided to "sublimate" their curiosity in the study of science, they decide to pursue astronomy over other fields of inquiry because, as Kayel says, "of all sciences, it is the least likely to intervene in our private life" (380). The instruments that surround Kayel and Djamileh for the rest of their days amplify vision in manners that differ from the invasive x-ray. Warner makes a specific reference to Djamileh's astronomy instruments in the last paragraph of her story:

> As time went on, and her grandchildren came clattering around the telescope, Djamileh's blue hair became silver; but to the day of her death her arched blue brows gave an appearance of alertness to her wrinkled countenance. (380)

Djamileh, as a daughter of Bluebeard and thus inevitably linked to the chamber and the force it exudes as a test of endurance, channels the gaze of Bluebeard upward and outward, rather than horizontally and invasively as in the Plath poem. As Plath implies, if the true chamber lies in Bluebeard's body and within his penetrating gaze, then the darkroom, operating room, and mad science lab can be eliminated along with him—but what if they are not? If the gaze persists in any form, as the chamber does in Djamileh's story, a comparative reading of these two pieces suggests the harmful gaze can and will be channeled elsewhere.

Warner's tale appears to offer a happy ending through reharnessing Bluebeard's gaze, yet the story's ambiguous and playful tone demonstrates that this is not entirely the case. Read through Perrault, Warner's and Plath's endings resonate with one another in similarly nuanced ways. Djamileh's telescope redirects Bluebeard's gaze, but just as she was "Bluebeard's Daughter" at the opening of the story, she is also "the wife of Kayel the astronomer," and the one who "worked out the mathematical calculations which enabled him to prove that the lost Pleiad would reappear in the year 1963" (MT 380). Bluebeard's daughter becomes Kayel's wife, progressing from her existence as one type of possession to another; and her scientific curiosity serves Kayel's work, not her own. The last line of Warner's tale perhaps best exemplifies this playfully cynical tone: "her teeth, glistening and perfect as in her girlhood, were shown off to the best advantage by the lining of her mouth, duskily blue as that of a well-bred chow dog's" (MT 380). Warner demonstrates how little has changed at the end of the story by comparing Djamileh's current state to her childhood existence as Bluebeard's daughter. Similarly, if Plath's speaker escapes she leaves Perrault's narrative of serial murder alive for its next

victims. Neither nuanced outcome reads as a conclusive victory for its female characters. This ambiguity does not discount each piece's display of female endurance and challenges to the fairy-tale tradition, but contrasts with the decidedly positive ending in Perrault: Bluebeard is murdered, his eighth wife inherits his wealth, buys gifts for her loved ones, and even remarries. Perrault explains that she ends the story monetarily and psychologically satisfied, surrounded by brocade furniture and a new husband, who helps her "forget the miserable time she had with Blue Beard" (MT 168).

CHAPTER 4

POSTSCRIPT

Alejandra Pizarnik and Sylvia Plath share more than the status of mythic suicide poet; they share marvelous source materials in their creative work. These materials are the classic print fairy tales, and while this study addresses two that appear prominently in each writer's corpus, many more fantastical intertexts exist between Plath and Pizarnik. This study makes passing references to "Sleeping Beauty," "Rapunzel," and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," for example, but leaves out Pizarnik's engagement with paper dolls that richly echoes Hans Christian Andersen's "Steadfast Tin Soldier," and Plath's rendition of the midnight ball in "Cinderella," not to mention each poet's explicit engagement with Lewis Carroll's marvelous *Alice* texts. There remain resonances left unmined in the comparative study of Plath and Pizarnik—revelatory work that lies beyond the scope of their psychic landscapes and has everything to do with fantastical textual echoes. Consequently, this study begins to fill a gap in the critical tradition of fairy-tale scholarship.

Again, Donald Haase speaks to this gap in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*: "scholars need to expand the focus of feminist fairy-tale research beyond the Western European and Anglo-American tradition, and even within those traditions to

investigate the fairy-tale intertexts in the work of minority writers" (129). The work done here creates international intertextual fairy-tale dialogues by placing Pizarnik into conversation with Plath's Anglo-American rewrites, and by emphasizing each one's place within their national traditions of fairy-tale tinkerers. Read first and foremost in and of themselves, against each other, and then through classic print versions of Red Riding Hood tales and the Bluebeard corpus, Plath and Pizarnik's texts reveal nuances in Perrault and the Grimms that speak to feminine agency as it relates to appetite, which encompasses desire and creativity, and endurance, which encompasses intrepidness and curiosity, that may otherwise slip through the cracks of fairy-tale scholarship. By lighting on Perrault and the Grimms in the end of these comparative analyses, this study contributes a reading strategy—a guide to lauding the multidesirous and multivalent identities of leading ladies in Perrault and the Grimms that would be inaccessible without the fairy-tale intertext of Alejandra Pizarnik and Sylvia Plath.

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